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MY HOST THE HINDU

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BY

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CONTENTS

Introduction	<i>page</i> 9
Gandhiji's Ashram	15
The Vows	27
Ashram Life	38
Mill-workers in Ahmedabad	44
A Conversation with Gandhiji	49
An Opium Shop in Delhi	56
The Gurukula	61
Wearing the Sari in Agra	67
A Hindu Revival Mission	75
Hindu Villages	82
Staying with Rabindranath Tagore	90
A Student of Mystics	95
Untouchables	100
Benares from a Barge	105
The Westerner Learns	112
Manners	118
Missionaries	125
A Visit to the Indian National Congress	139
The House of the Seven Brothers	148
Good-bye to Gandhiji	155

INTRODUCTION

A raconteur has just finished a perfect story, short, polished and to the point. He is quietly enjoying the effect it has produced, when some irritating person inquires, "And then what happened?"

Generations of nursemaids, parents and guardians have had the experience of being driven to a state of irritation bordering on frenzy by inquisitive children, who want to go a little further than the story takes them. Such children bore nurses and grown-up friends alike, but even though they forfeit the easy popularity of childhood, they do not grow wise by experience. Later on they begin to incense sisters, brothers and schoolfellows by their obstinate queries, by continually "wanting to know".

When I was a child, I used to be taken up to London to see a pantomime every Christmas. The train had to encounter strange and all-pervading odours before it could reach Liverpool Street. Grown-ups would pull up the windows with a peremptory clatter, while the more fastidious might even hold their handkerchiefs to their noses. "What's the smell?" asked the children.

"Bone manure being made into soap in factories at Bow," was the reply. It was a perfectly correct answer, but I could not get satisfaction out of it. I wanted to know what it felt like to have that smell oozing in through the cracks of one's bedroom window all night. I wanted to know how the

inhabitants of those interminable rows of grimy houses seen from the train, thought and talked, and what they ate and drank. Was everything flavoured by the local odour? Then we steamed into Liverpool Street Station, and soon my curiosity was effectually diverted to the antics of the clown or the beautiful clothes of the heroine.

Years passed before that curiosity revived in full force. I was eighteen, and ready for any adventure. A friend asked me to spend an evening with her at a factory-girls' club in Bow. There I met scores of people who surely should have been able to enlighten me. But I found that it was not considered good form to ask questions, whatever might be the eagerness in one's mind. The only thing to do was to come again. I did so, and the more I came, the more questions there were to be answered.

I wanted to know how a girl of my own age felt who was working ten hours a day at a machine, and had been doing it for the last four years, while I had been playing lacrosse and cricket at school. What was it like to live next door to a noisy public-house, to have no garden, to sleep four in a bed, and sometimes six in a room? What did a policeman look like inside his own home? Was a Saturday night "drunk and disorderly" a pleasant fellow during the rest of the week? Was it overtime that made the girls at the Club look so pallid? How did they come by certain of their strange notions, some of them slightly tinged with bitterness, which they held with an unshakable

conviction, and a dignity that had something very advanced and mature about it?

For years I went up to Bow two nights a week, seeking an answer to these questions and many others. Each problem solved opened up a host of new ones, and it became quite clear that evenings were not enough. I must be an inhabitant of Bow if I were ever to understand things. First I took an empty room, then a flat, and finally, with some others, a house.

One sees things from a very different angle if one is living in a noisy street, in a shoddily built house that lets the rain through the walls, with a gate that is swung off its hinges by the terrific onslaught of boys and girls, who between school-hours and bedtime never leave one's window, and a pocket-handkerchief garden in which everything that is planted incontinently dies.

My neighbours were Borough Councillors, unskilled labourers, foremen, unemployed. By now they had come to realise that I was in earnest, and not merely a middle-class sensation-monger. When I asked them questions they tried to instruct me, and I progressed under their diversified tuition. Together we formed a sort of school for our mutual improvement, and soon acquired a hall, to form a local centre of fellowship where all neighbours would be welcome, where we could work out our own salvation, and find the answers to each other's questions.

Here gathered scores of people whose eagerness

to understand the other man's point of view overleapt the barriers of race and religion, the centuries behind and the centuries before. We were a motley crew—materialist and Christian, Socialist and Tory, rich and poor, thieves, bookies and drunks. We welcomed to our group Belgians, Germans and French, soldiers, sailors and conscientious objectors, Cabinet Ministers and Communists, Moslems, Buddhists and atheists. The hungry rich came as well as the hungry poor.

We wanted to know if Christianity really could be practised. So we tackled recalcitrant landlords, who let their tenants become crippled with rheumatism; and formed voluntary poverty groups, where professionals, business people, labourers and unemployed met every month to decide what should be done with the surplus income of the preceding four weeks. At length we established a community of men and women, who, by living together and devoting themselves to service, hoped to get a firm grip on Reality. Life became eventful. We were raided by the police, threatened with vitriol, bombed by a Zeppelin, and warned in writing that if we walked down a certain street we should be "done in".

We wanted to know if groups like ours existed in other parts of the world. Then quite suddenly we heard rumours of a new awakening in India. Untouchability was being broken down; there was a new political party that was eschewing the usually accepted methods of propaganda, and had pinned

its faith on the teaching of a strange man, who disallowed violence, and, when things went wrong, punished himself instead of the culprit. We heard that he refused riches, honours and luxury, and chose to live on the minimum of necessities, considering himself actually in debt to the peasant and the coolie; that he called on all he met to give themselves to the service of the poor.

In our desire to know more of this movement we invited Indians to our group, and one night Professor Gangulee, the son-in-law of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, came to address us. This visit led to friendship, which in turn led to an invitation.

"I wish you would come and stay with us in India for a few months," he said to me. "If you could spare the time to leave your work, I would arrange it all. You would stay two months with Gandhiji, one month with the Poet,¹ and then for a month see various places of interest. If only you will come as our guest, I will arrange everything."

I needed no pressing, and the winter of 1926-27 saw two of us for thirteen weeks the guest of "My Host the Hindu."

¹ Dr. Tagore's usual title.

The little village was inundated with visitors, all dressed in Khaddar, the coarse homespun and hand-woven material which is the unmistakable sign of an admirer and follower of Gandhiji. That day the dusty road through the diminutive village appeared gay with white saris¹ and dhoties² donned in his honour; for he shares with John Woolman, the Quaker, a disapproval of dyed garments, and to-day was his birthday, the fifty-seventh. It was being kept in characteristic fashion. The big courtyard of the National School was covered with an awning, beneath which scores of people sat spinning; as I was conducted to the presence of my host, the steady hum of the tcherka³ fell on my ears.

I noticed a conglomeration of discarded sandals as I stepped on to the verandah, and, observing that everybody in the courtyard was barefooted, I tried hastily to kick off my shoes. But Gandhiji had seen me, and came striding across the courtyard to greet me, and to set me at my ease at once, assuring me that it did not matter whether my shoes were on or off. He struck me as a delightful man, friendly, of an exquisite courtesy, swift of perception, of high vitality, genuinely concerned for everybody's comfort and well-being.

He directed one of his followers to take me to my room, a little shed with low rafters, along which the

¹ Sari = the woman's garment.

² Dhoti = the man's one-piece suit.

³ Tcherka = spinning-wheel.

squirrels chased one another merrily. It contained a pitcher of water, a brass drinking-jar, a hurricane lamp, a bench, shelf, wooden table, and a rough bedstead made of the unsmoothed branches of trees with twined string plaited across from side to side

After unpacking a few things, I was shown the bath-shed on the other side of the garden, and initiated into the accepted Hindu mode of washing. I was free to do as I liked, but if I wished to live as my hosts did, I must not plunge my hands or face or feet into the serviceable pail which stood invitingly awaiting me; I must use a brass vase, and, ladling up water in it, proceed to pour it over myself, manipulating the soap meanwhile as best I could. I found that it was easiest to lift up the whole pailful and pour it over one's shoulders and down one's back in a welcome stream.

Visitors' food is always cooked by Mrs. Gandhi, so several hours later I was conducted to her hospitable verandah. Here, little wooden stools were set out; one, four inches high to squat on, and another opposite it, six inches high, to hold one's brass dish of food. I found I was less uncomfortable if I discarded the stool and squatted on the floor, and even then I had to change my position fairly often. European ankles evidently need hardening before the squatting position can be enjoyed. Grave-faced Hindu hosts concerned themselves with my well-being, encouraging me to eat with my fingers, but

courteously assuring me that a spoon could easily be procured if I liked. They tried to translate the names of the little piles of food dotted about on the great brass dish before me, while the Professor of Economics who was acting as Mrs. Gandhi's waiter continually brought fresh supplies of hot chapatties (flat bread pancakes).

During the afternoon a seemingly interminable play was produced by the school-children. Of course I could not understand a word of it, but it represented the boyhood of some ancient Hindu hero, who at an early age became unpopular with the authorities, from his father and schoolmaster up to the hierarchy, and eventually the King himself, because in season and out of season he kept asserting that God was greater than any visible ruler, sacred or secular. The boy actor suffered every sort of persecution through an entire afternoon. After an hour I became too stiff to squat any longer, so I slipped out of the immense crowd and made for my room. Unfortunately I slept too long to return in time for the second representation, which was a scene from *By An Unknown Disciple*, relative to the Crucifixion.

Meanwhile, some five hundred people had assembled, bringing greetings to their beloved leader. One guest was welcomed with very great affection, greeted as "Big Brother" and given the place of honour on the raised dais. It threatened to give way, however, as he rather gingerly lowered his great weight on to it, and with a laugh he chose the

earth instead. This was Shaukat Ali, the Moslem leader, a fine, erect man with flashing eyes, gleaming teeth, and a big, infectious laugh.

To feed a company of some five or six hundred guests would cost a good deal of thought and preparation with us, but there, in the courtyard of Gandhiji's school, it seemed a simple affair. We were all asked to sit down in rows; then platters made of leaves fastened together with thorns were brought to each of us; next, men and women passed up and down between the rows, carrying on their left arms great shallow baskets of raisins, grapes or nuts, which they handed out in generous quantities to every hungry guest. Raisins, grapes and nuts! My heart sank at the prospect of having a starchless, breadless meal. It was about five o'clock, and the only other meal that day had been at half-past ten. I am a hungry sort of person, so that living in India promised to hold many disadvantages for me. But this patriarchal fare proved to be quite surprisingly satisfying, and the succession of courteous fellow-guests who entertained me, answering my questions with tireless patience, made me feel ashamed of my querulous appetite.

Soon after the meal most of the guests departed. The sun was setting; a bell summoned us to prayer. We went through a garden-path winding down towards the river, by the banks of which was a sandy praying-ground about the size of a tennis-court. In the middle of the long side a musician sat with his

“vina” of delicate workmanship and beautifully polished wood. He played strains that seemed to have no beginning and no end. The weird notes appeared to my Western ear, untrained in Indian cadences, to meander in a sad and plaintive way. Then, the musician began to sing prayers and songs of praise to God.

The scores of worshippers with noiseless tread were wending their way from every direction to the praying-ground. They put off their sandals, and left them with their gleaming lamps outside the enclosure. Perhaps a hundred of us squatted there, as the moon rose, a scimitar of silver. Soon the music became communal. The “Ramayama” was sung, and other chants and prayers. Then the music ceased, and Gandhiji led the devotions of his people, reading portions of the Gita and expounding them sentence by sentence. In his super-practical way, which is a source of constant surprise to people when they first meet him, he went on to say that as the morrow was his silence day he would that night give the summary of the past day’s activities.

In characteristically unsentimental fashion he referred to the festivities. This was not a time for amusements and entertainments. Was it fitting that the people of a country that was not yet free, a country under a foreign yoke, should be arranging pleasures for themselves? All their efforts and endeavours should be directed to winning their way out of bondage. But the children of the school had

desired to give a play, and he had not liked to thwart their intentions of entertaining him. The play had been quite well produced. They had obviously worked hard preparing for it, and were to be congratulated. The stage managers had borrowed certain properties for their performance from various individuals, a chair from one, a stool from another, and so on. Some of these had not been returned. Lack of thoroughness was anti-social, and a careless people could never set up a great and free state. Let the whole community concentrate more than ever during the year that was to come, on serving God, their country, and the poor.

Silence fell and we departed to our rooms. After three-quarters of an hour's devotions bed was very welcome. It was obvious that this was a strictly disciplined community.

Strictly disciplined indeed! Next morning at 3.50 a.m. a leather-covered stick beat on a bell until we forsook our beds for the bath, that strange poured-over bath. Then on all sides lights were seen moving towards the river. Forty more minutes of devotion found me ready for breakfast, but none was forthcoming until the six o'clock sunrise. Should I creep back to bed for the intervening period, or diligently set my house in order? Housework at 4.50 a.m.! Well, it would be something to write home about anyhow, if it were possible to fill an hour and ten minutes with cleaning out such a house as this, a mere shed with a verandah in front of it.

But as one feels no hunger during sleep, I shamefacedly contracted the habit of creeping back into bed again. Once I found that something else had crept in during my distant orisons: a little, quick-clutching paw shook the mosquito net in the darkness, and I leapt out of bed in terror. The field-rat which had taken refuge there was equally afraid, I think, but after that I carefully tucked my curtains under my mattress when I went to prayers each morning.

Mrs. Gandhi makes delectable coffee, and even when the supply of beans runs out she can still produce the beverage from a judicious mixture of various sorts of spices. The sunrise meal consists of two cups of coffee, and two slices of dry toast.

As we sat on her wide verandah waiting, our fellow-guests would gradually congregate. One was a Buddhist monk in saffron-coloured cotton robe, a young man who rarely spoke. He was invested with the same strange air of gravity as that in which the Hindus seem to live. Coming from his open-air ablutions, he would enter the verandah with his usual earnestness, and then sit waiting with us for his coffee; but how far removed he seemed, from our crude hunger and our quick, energetic movements! Then one by one the children of the household, Gandhiji's grandchildren, would appear, fill their brass mugs with water from the well, select with a connoisseur's eye a certain twig from a handful put ready for use, and begin the twelve minutes' mouth

and teeth cleaning, an integral part of the Hindu's religion.

Often, before we had finished our meal, the women from the neighbouring houses would arrive, pull a few blossoms from the bushes, heap them on a brass plate, and enter Gandhiji's room for the daily hour of prayer and study which he holds for those whose housework keeps them away from the early worship.

This reminded us that we must hurry to get our work done before the heat of the day. There was water to be drawn from the well for our own rooms and for the bathroom, and our share of the sanitary work to be done, since there were no sweepers there. The greatest person is the servant of all; thus in this community the Brahmins do the dirty sanitary work, and the Untouchable is honoured. Then there was the laundry. Every day seems to be a washing day for a Hindu; every single garment must be washed each day. So we would stand on the bottom step of the stone flight which led from the garden-path into the swift-flowing river. Our soap-balls, bought by the pound, were beside us. It was strange to stand there, bent almost double, washing one's clothes, in the burning sun with a topee¹ on one's head, the sweat trickling down one's nose, with the added distraction of fending off the fishes, which seemed to like white ankles and shins. But the reward of the discomfort came when the drying started. To find everything dried and gleaming white after

¹ Topee = helmet.

half an hour in the sun was a constant source of delight.

Next we were initiated into the mysteries of spinning. Visitors appeared constantly at the foot of our verandah steps gazing at our crude attempts to work the spinning-wheel. They would not address us, unless we first made the sign: that would be rude. But to stare is not rude, and they came closer and closer in their overpowering desire to know what two English people were doing as inmates of Gandhiji's Ashram. We soon began conversations, and then the questions came thick and fast.

"Are you staying here?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"A month, we hope."

"Do you admire Gandhiji?"

"Very much indeed."

"How do you know anything about him?"

We replied that long ago, we had read every book about him that we could get hold of.

"And why did you come here?"

"Because we wanted to know you all and worship with you."

A long pause of amazement always followed that answer.

"But how can the British admire Gandhiji, when he has stood against their Government so much?"

"That's easy. Don't you think we ever stand

against our own Government at home? We are constantly doing it. And we glory in anyone who is fearless and who keeps the laws of God, even if we don't agree with their ideas!"

"Do you mean to say that English people ever stand out against the Government?"

With a laugh we would reply: "Many people in England are never happy unless they are against the Government."

"Oh, that is news to us. We thought you were all so proud, and liked to keep subject peoples under your sway."

"Have you been to England?" I would ask. "Have you ever met any of the working people of England? Tell me what you know about the country."

And then the same thing always happened. Wherever I went, I found abysmal ignorance of any progressive movement in England. They had never heard of the existence of a pacifist, and our various experiments in voluntary poverty seemed strangely wonderful to them. They thought we were Imperialists and materialists to a man. They could not believe that any English person breathed who did not eat meat; and as for drink, it was some time before I could convince them of my honesty, when I declared that I never touched alcohol. They were so delighted by this time, that they were ready to believe the best of me, but this final piece of news was too amazing and preposterous for them to accept. English people

always drank. They must be misunderstanding me. I could not really mean to say that, like them, I loathed the stuff.

"Tell us some more, sister." It was nearly always the same request. They would climb the verandah steps and squat on the floor of my room, while I told them stories of various people all over Europe, who had led forlorn hopes or espoused unpopular causes, who had lived out their religion in their everyday lives, who had given up great possessions, who had refused to kill even at the bidding of their War Office, and had stood alone as pioneers and prophets, counting themselves in the majority because God was with them.

It was terrible for me to see the wonder and amazed joy that seemed to fill them, when they discovered that their aspirations and ours were really identical. How was it that they had never known these things before?

THE VOWS

One cannot spend many hours at the Ashram without noticing that here is a group of people, who have imposed upon themselves an exceedingly strict discipline. After a little conversation, one comes to realise that Gandhiji has worked out certain rules of life and conduct, that his followers all over India are trying to put into practice. They are summed up in the five vows, or principles, which regulate the lives of all his followers.

The first is the Vow of Purity. This means purity of word, deed and thought, and his people are oppressively conscious of the difficulty of keeping the rule. They hold that child marriage is a violation of natural and divine law, but many of them were themselves married as children, before Gandhiji's programme was heard of. Their regret and sorrow for this bad start in life seem almost to overwhelm them sometimes, and they plunge into propaganda for the abolition of this custom with a fervour that it is hoped will release them from their lingering sense of shame.

"Keep your eyes on the ground as you walk lest you encounter a woman," was the advice given to men. If, through inadvertence, they came face to face with women, they had to force themselves to consider them as so many blades of grass. This

old advice was altered. "Learn to look on every woman as your mother or your sister," says Gandhiji.

The clash between Eastern and Western standards, however, painfully confuses the issue. The uncovered head and neck of a European woman shock normal Hindu susceptibilities, just as the shining brown bodies of Hindu men and the bare feet of Hindu women may perturb Europeans when they first encounter them. Custom at length robs the situation of awkwardness, but there are still many Hindus who follow the ancient precepts of their race.

The second is the Vow of Purity of the Palate. Emphatically, this rule does not appeal to the average European. "One must not eat or drink for the sake of any pleasure to be derived from the food, but merely to keep oneself alive and fit for one's work." I found this a hard saying indeed. Only once did I take on a fast, and that was when a germ got the better of me and Gandhiji constituted himself my doctor—a rôle he loves to assume. He rarely comes out of his workroom until his daily walk at the hour of sunset, but whenever illness occurs among any of the two hundred inmates of the Ashram he is on the spot at once, diagnosing and prescribing with a very obvious delight. Fasting is, of course, his favourite remedy, and after three days of it I registered a silent vow that whatever noxious germ might attack me in the future I would dissemble and take any steps rather than disclose the fact to him. His advice is never to use more than five ingredients

at any meal. Oranges, grapes, home-made wheat-meal biscuits, ghi¹ and milk form his own dinner. Salt he eschews. He recommends, "Be like Mr. Gladstone and chew your food thoroughly. If your business takes you into the midst of infectious or epidemic disease, cut down your food supply by one half." This is his constant habit when, on the outburst of smallpox, plague, or any other epidemic, he gives himself, weeks at a time, to the task of nursing.

Happily for visitors to the Ashram, Mrs. Gandhi, who presides over the kitchen, does not agree with her husband's dietetic restrictions; and as he never attempts to coerce anyone to share his views, we had a much more varied menu than our host.

It seems natural to anyone brought up in the Hindu religion to fast. I went to call on a journalist acquaintance who had set himself to accomplish a twenty-four days' fast in order "to conquer a moral fault" (so his purpose, formally announced at prayers, was translated to me). I found him lying in bed on the twenty-first day very happy and peaceful. I was thankful that I was able to convince myself that all my faults would be even more deeply impressed on my mind and character than they are, were I to undertake this method of cleansing. Quite possibly, however, I was rationalising.

The third is the vow of Ahimsa, or Non-violence. There is nothing negative or passive in Gandhiji's

¹ Ghi = melted butter.

conception of Non-violence. He holds that violence is wrong, not only a sin against God and a sin against men, but a sin against self, because it defeats its own ends. Can one overcome evil by killing the evil-doer? Gandhiji is an exceedingly practical person, and this principle was conceived in action. He does not eschew violence merely because it is against his principles, but on rational grounds. He thinks violence harms the victor as well as the vanquished. He trusts wholly the method of Satyagraha, love-force, all that is implied in the words we sing:

Sufficient is Thine arm alone
And our defence is sure.

Time after time he has been in mortal danger; attacked, beaten, trampled on and left for dead by the people he was trying to serve in South Africa; he has faced death on many occasions since. He does not attempt to defend himself. He knows God is with him, that is enough. Cowardice he hates. He explains in the pages of *Young India* that it is better to use violence than to run away, but that both attitudes are absurd and both leave God out of account.

The interpretation of this vow is not confined to its physical implications. It is not sufficient to renounce weapons and the use of brute force. His followers have to rid themselves of all anger and bitterness. How completely they do this I learnt while staying at a humble little Hindu home. I did

not know my host until I arrived, but having heard that I wanted to visit his city he had sent a message to the Ashram inviting me there as his guest. Much readjustment had to be made and expense incurred to accommodate a European visitor. The orthodox mother was a little scandalised, and more than a little perturbed at having an Englishwoman in the house, wondering how the stranger would observe the hours of worship. Would she, inadvertently perhaps, disturb the religious offerings set up each morning in a corner of the tiny courtyard, the little shapes of clay and patterns of chalk, and offerings of flowers, each of which had some sacred significance? If the mother was troubled, the neighbours were vociferously indignant. Everyone knew how much this particular family and their friends had contributed to the national cause during the Non-Co-operative days, how they had been plunged into poverty, how the two sons had been in and out of prison so often that at last the eldest brother had lost his reason, how he roamed the house now, a silent Khaddar-clothed figure, like an emaciated spectre of his former self, how my host's mother-in-law, a public-spirited educationist, had herself been in gaol for two years as a political prisoner under the British rule. Surely they had suffered enough from the English without having extra burdens, domestic and financial, thrust upon them by the arrival of two of the foreigners, with their unaccommodating conventions, their distrust of images, and their big

appetites. The master of the household, however, silenced the murmurs of the neighbours, and removed the apprehension of the mother, reminding them of Gandhiji's teaching, his insistence on the difference between the British system of Government which he calls Satanic, and the British people as individuals whom he admires and loves. Cannot one hate sin while loving the sinner? Moreover, if the English were sinners, assuredly the Hindus were exactly in the same category. Sin was common to all. Therefore it behoved them to pray more, to root out hate and bitterness, to give themselves more completely to service, to concentrate upon God, Whose will is that all men should be brothers. The mother was exhorted and encouraged to accept us, and as soon as we arrived began to cook for us and wait on us with the customary self-abnegation of a Hindu woman.

During the height of the Non-Co-operation campaign, when volunteers by the thousand were working under Gandhiji's direction, and rightly or wrongly, the people believed that they were within a few weeks of complete independence, Gandhiji suddenly terminated the campaign and called off all the active workers. This was a terrible blow, for many had sacrificed their all to the cause. What on earth was Gandhiji's motive? Anxiously they awaited his explanation. In characteristic fashion he went to the root of the matter at once. National independence was their right; freedom was God's will

for every nation. The source and spring of the whole endeavour was to win for the country what God desired them to have, His gift to them. But in the course of their struggle they had not kept their motives pure; some had been bitter. They had not kept the Vow of Ahimsa, some had even shed blood. Such things were sin. They were trying to win God's good gift of freedom by methods abhorrent to God. It were better not to win freedom than to win it on such terms. He was profoundly disappointed. He had expected them to exercise self-control, they had failed. He was to blame as well as they. All he could do was to terminate the campaign and call off the volunteers. But let them not imagine that they were now no longer needed in the great work of emancipating their country. They were needed as much as ever, possibly more. But now it was for quieter, humbler work. Let them start now to serve their beloved country by working in the countless villages of the land. Let them enlighten the ignorant, break down untouchability, discourage child-marriage, set up dispensaries, purify the water-supply, teach spinning and weaving. Let these volunteers enlist as Village Workers. Thus there would be built up all over the country an enlightened people, self-controlled, striving for God's gift of freedom along the lines of unselfish service.

The crisis was acute. Many obeyed his call, but thousands of people turned away sorrowful. They were not made of the stuff that could endure such

a life-long service. Their courage was fine enough for the stirring duties of the great campaign, when news of their spectacular triumphs was telegraphed all over the world, but this other task, no, it was beyond them. So they went back to their old life, picked up the threads once more of the business they had deserted, trailed back to college to finish their University careers, turned up Examination records once again, and all this with a dangerously lowered sense of self-respect.

This disillusionment led to a lamentable state of affairs. It was during its aftermath that I had arrived in India. As a result of it, military drill was gaining a foothold in schools and colleges. I do not know what seemed to me more incongruous, the Missionary Training College, supported by followers of the Prince of Peace, instituting an O.T.C. among their Hindu students, hitherto adherents of Gandhiji and his vow of Ahimsa, or a Hindu school where boys were given rifle drill because, as the head master said: "We have come to the conclusion that we have got to learn to get a little brutalised. It is the only language understood by the West."

The fourth vow is that of Non-Theft. "If you have more than you need while others have less than they need, you are a thief." Gandhiji never beats about the bush in his language. It is sometimes a little disconcerting in its directness and force. His ruthless pronouncements may be accepted or denied, but they leave one in no doubt as to his attitude towards

life. They neither soothe nor comfort the sentimental philanthropist, but their practical value is tremendous. "You must face the poor with the mind of the poor." He insists upon repeating this phrase in season and out of season, for he knows, as we, alas! know only too well, the ease with which the passionate champion of the under-dog becomes by infinitesimal degrees transformed into the Moderate, muzzled by flattery. In keeping with this attitude is Gandhiji's advice to all to travel third class. One has to see a Hindu trainload with its human freight in order fully to know what that means. But if ever the horror of those overcrowded compartments is to be abolished, they must be described and talked about; the illiterate poor suffer in silence, the cultured middle-class volunteer becomes vocal after a single journey.

On one occasion Gandhiji was asked to address the students of a certain famous Hindu University, which was built and endowed solely by Indians, and which refuses to apply for the grant of a single rupee from the Government. The students are very proud of this position of independence. Fifteen hundred of them were assembled to hear his address. He had much to say to them about how best they could serve the country. Then he put his finger on their most sensitive spot. "You are justly proud of your University, and you are very happy here; you like to think that all you are enjoying is the gift of the Maharajahs, that for your learning you are

indebted to none but Indian benefactors, but I tell you you are mistaken. You are deeply in debt to the poorest peasant. It is the ryots¹ who keep you and clothe you and feed you. It is the poor who built these splendid halls. This place was created only by the blood and sweat of workmen. You will never be free of your debt to them unless, when you leave, you devote the rest of your lives to their service."

It was a pleasure to be able to tell Gandhiji's followers that the vow of non-theft has been familiar to us in the West for centuries, to quote to them one of the greatest thinkers of the Middle Ages, who laid it down in no uncertain voice that "those who possess superfluities when their brethren lack necessities possess the goods of others and are therefore stealing."

The fifth is the vow of Truth. This may read as a mere copy-book maxim, but actually it can be considered more accurately as marking a new era in political development. "You must tell the Truth", says Gandhiji, "without fear and without exaggeration. You must tell it to people who do not want to listen to it. You must tell it in quarters where the telling of it may cover you with scorn, or lose you your job, or land you in jail."

In the days of the Non-Co-operation Movement, when a new campaign was initiated, every detail would be carefully planned out; but before the first

¹ Ryots = peasants.

item of the programme was put into operation, Gandhiji would disclose to the nearest British Official what he was about to do.

In a later chapter I shall tell of my own indebtedness to this vow, when, in response to my request, Gandhiji gave me a message to bring back to the people of England, and I found, somewhat to my dismay, that conforming to the Vow of Truth implied more than accuracy. Acting on his advice, I approached each official named by him, including the Earl of Lytton, Lord Birkenhead, and the India Office officials. Whether I saw them in person or their representatives, in each case I was conscious of an access of power and courage, once the dreaded interview was over. Later on, in England, I had to address audiences, some large and some small, and it was perhaps natural that a section of the Press, believing that the telling of my facts would have a damaging effect on certain vested interests which they represented, sought by time-honoured methods to heap ridicule upon me and to question my accuracy. Then I blessed Gandhiji in my heart for the steadying power of the Vow of Truth. I was able to turn the tables on those of my assailants who asked rhetorical questions as to where I had gleaned my figures and facts, by replying that the source of my information was the India Office itself.

ASHRAM LIFE

It took only a short time each day to clean my room, but I used to hesitate over such problems as ants' and wasps' nests. I should not have discovered the ants if I had not dropped my wet bathing dress on the red-flagged floor one morning, so that the water dripped down the cracks between the stones. Finding themselves in peril of flood, a colony of ants below struggled to the upper air and swarmed over my floor. I felt pleased at the ease with which I destroyed these aliens, until later, when I was recounting the incident to one of my hosts, I noticed a look of suspended animation on her face. She said nothing, but I realised that I had broken the Vow of Ahimsa. Later on, some wasps built a nest in my room. It increased in size daily, and they flew in and out freely. I wanted to destroy them, but I am afraid of insects and hate to touch them. So I found an unorthodox Buddhist who had often coped with such situations herself. She brought a rubber sponge-bag, stretched it over the hard wax nest, broke it off from the corner where it hung, ran to the river and flung the whole bundle in.

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If a poisonous snake appears in the garden it is not killed. Someone goes out with a contrivance of

bamboo, rope and a ring, and catching the creature, carries it far away into the jungle. There he lets it loose again, where it will be harmless.

While the river was in flood, rushing by the Ashram at a glorious pace, muddy, turbulent and swirling, the boys from the school fetched Gandhiji each day for a morning swim. An Indian girl and I joined the party. It was well out of our depth, and the flood rushed us speedily along the whole length of the Ashram grounds. It was necessary to land at the lower flight of steps, for beyond our garden there was no landing-place. I had never swum in a flood before, and found it so exhilarating that I returned to do it a second time alone. I had just come to the point where I must strike out energetically to the right in order to gain the landing-place, when I saw, reared up on the steps looking at me, a large snake. Inauspicious moment for my first sight of the long-dreaded reptile! Dared I land?

If I did not I should assuredly drown, for the river was much stronger than I. I struck out manfully for the shore, telling myself that possibly the creature would avoid me when I landed, and turn away like a gentleman. As I consoled myself thus, battling against the water and my terror, the snake made a sudden dive into the water at the exact point where I must land.

"Was it a green snake?" asked Gandhiji nonchalantly, when I related the story afterwards. "Ah,

then he was quite harmless", and my story fell as flat as a chapatti.

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All the dwellers of the Ashram were invited to meet one afternoon to discuss the ethic of an act just committed by a mill-owner of Ahmedabad. The papers were full of it, and public opinion was so roused that there was talk of a Hartal (a one-day's protest strike). The dog is an unclean animal to the Hindu: he is unhealthy, owing to his scavenging habits, and a disease-carrier: therefore he is neglected and often becomes a danger to the community. Nevertheless the "Jain" principle of the sacredness of life is very strong in this neighbourhood, and therefore crowds of dogs prowl about the city undisturbed, but unfed. Their wretched condition was noticed by this merciful mill-owner. Indeed, he noticed far too many of them, for people contracted the habit of driving into his compound any particularly wretched-looking dog, or any dog that was becoming a nuisance to them personally. At last some seventy dogs seemed to look upon his place as a home. He could have driven them away, but knew not where they could go, without suffering and doing harm!

He spent a sleepless night on the problem, and then taking his courage in both hands he braved public opinion and went and shot them all. They were out of their misery. His was to begin. He was

accounted godless, perfidious, a subversive innovator. Convinced of the rightness of his action, he called at the Ashram to find out Gandhiji's viewpoint, and to his own great delight and the amazement of the Ashram dwellers found the author of the Vow of Ahimsa in agreement with him.

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I made many friends at the Ashram, Moslem, Hindu, Parsi and Buddhist, whose names I have forgotten: and yes, one Christian, an American, whom I remember chiefly because I overheard one sentence of conversation he was having with Gandhiji in his room, while we were dining outside on the verandah. The voices were droning on, and we were reading over our meal, when suddenly I heard Gandhiji's voice very clear and precise, a little raised. Evidently something the visitor said had roused him.

"But if you want your Missionaries to have the protection of soldiers in China, you are denying your own doctrine of the Cross."

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"If you've nothing better to do, would you care to come to the College this afternoon?" asked Gandhiji, as he stood in the doorway of his room, surveying his guest at the midday meal on the verandah. This was just what I had long wanted, so I got up gladly. "Not now, you must finish your

meal first. My friend's car will be here soon, and he can bring you down. I prefer to walk", and he set out with his big staff. I had heard that he was giving weekly lectures on the New Testament, at the Non-Co-operation College a few miles distant. On my arrival a string of cars was outside; people evidently came in from the city to hear these lectures, and the big room was crowded to the very doors. Row behind row, and very close together squatted the students, each dressed in Khaddar, each provided with a stout, black, shiny-covered Bible. At the far end of the room the divan was placed where the musician sat playing the "vina" to prepare the minds of the audience for the subject they were to study.

In front of the divan two brass vases filled with flowers stood on the floor. On the walls of the room hung two Italian pictures dealing with a Biblical subject. When the music ceased Gandhiji took his place on the divan, and told us all to find Matthew v. 7, while he read aloud "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Then he held them with an hour's exegesis in Gujarati, while I watched the wasps and ants on the wall with apprehension.

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In the Ashram hymn-book there are five of our hymns. Gandhiji's favourite among them is "When I survey the wondrous Cross". The other four are

certainly not specimens of our best, so I lent him a book containing some finer examples of Christian hymnology, but he still preferred to keep to the old ones. They were dear to him for memory's sake.

I in my turn appropriated treasures translated for me by Hindu friends at the Ashram. "The righteous may fall before the blows of the wicked, as doth the sandal tree, which, when it is felled, perfumes the axe that lays it low." "If, when a man is beating you unjustly, he drops the stick he is using, stoop down, pick it up, and return it to him without a word." "Just as the earth continues to nourish and sustain her children even when they tear and rend her bosom with a plough, so must we return good for evil."

MILL-WORKERS IN AHMEDABAD

Driving one morning with one of the City Medical Officers through the streets of Ahmedabad, I heard of the enormous infant mortality rate. An Indian mill-owner was with us and showed what he was doing to combat the evil. There was a dispensary and a nursing home for mothers in connection with his mill, and a crèche where seventy babies are deposited every morning by his women mill-hands. The alternative to a crèche is dope, which is more general and more popular. He had set up schools for the children of his workmen, but old customs die hard; and while it is an accepted thing throughout India for children to crawl about on the ground below the machines, it is difficult to persuade them to attend school.

The bigger boys and girls of the family love their independence, of course, but it is natural that at the end of a long day spent in hanging about the city, waiting for the evening meal, they have picked up information as well as food, friends as well as habits, that are not exactly good for them.

In Ahmedabad, this great problem of the break-up of the home through industrialism is being tackled, among other things, by a group of middle-class enthusiasts who banded themselves together some ten years ago and formed a Textile Union. On its

committee, Untouchables sit side by side with caste people. It has three thousand paying members. It possesses its own research department and library. It supports a nursery school for the children of its members. It runs twenty-two other schools in the city, some of them boarding schools in which Untouchable children are under the care of resident Brahmin teachers. It arranges lectures on hygiene, alcohol and sanitation. It reduced the hours of work from twelve to ten per day, and raised the age of permissible child-labour by two years. The President is a woman, and she took me over several of the schools. It was good to see the scholars, who, previously, unkempt and unfed for twelve hours a day, had had the run of the city streets, so obviously enjoying themselves with games and pictures. Their ages ranged from five to ten, and each showed me with pride how much spinning he had done. A new dhoti each year is theirs by right, if they spin the requisite amount of yarn. Such soiled, uneven, clumsy cotton it looked. Incredible that it could ever be worth weaving! But the dhoti one knows will be forthcoming in any case, and the wearer will be very proud. I was looking at these children as they played, thinking how essentially like our own children in Bow they were, and how soon one forgot the difference in colour, when the founder of the school interrupted my thoughts.

"You may find it hard to believe, Miss Lester, but each one of these children was a regular drinker

until we opened this school and weaned them away from it," she said.

Later I met several members of the Union Executive and heard from them how they had increased the current rate of pay by 33 per cent. "We went to the employers with our request, and asked them to consider the pay received by the men and women. A pound or two for a month's work was but a meagre return for their labours. The industry could stand higher wages; we had ascertained that first. But they refused. So we all met on the broad stretch of sand by the river to discuss the situation. We came to the conclusion that it was right to claim more money, and we decided that none of us would give way or return to the mills till our needs were met. It is not the custom here to give strike-pay as in England, so everyone turned his hand to this job and that, to agriculture or to hawking, to housework or to coolie work. They were stirring times, and the people behaved splendidly. After two or three weeks some found difficulty in earning their livelihood and began to grumble. Gandhiji was beginning work on his Ashram at the time, so he announced that any could come and do coolie work there if they cared to, and he would pay the current rate of wages.

Crowds came, and among them the laziest, who imagined that their new employer, being a saint, would not be strictly businesslike. Others looked upon it as a put-up job, thinking that his aim was

to bolster up the strike by paying out money irrespective of the work done. Gandhiji showed them their job; they had to carry baskets of stone and earth from one end of the grounds to the other. He had worked out with his usual precision how many of these journeys would earn a man a half-penny, and he kept count himself of the number of journeys made by each man. At the end of the day he handed them their pay.

"What is this, Mahatmaji?" one would ask, regarding the penny or two he had received.

"Your pay," answered their employer.

"At what rate?" inquired the workmen astounded.

"The usual rate of coolies' work."

"But we are not coolies: we are skilled workmen."

"You undertook to do coolies' work here."

"But an anna or two! How can I feed my family on that?"

"You should have worked properly. Then you would have earned enough," and he turned to the next wage-earner.

That night there was grumbling by the river. Some were openly announcing their intention of returning to work. When the meeting began, Gandhiji spoke. "So you have changed your opinion, weavers and spinners. You now begin to think that your former demands were unjust."

There was a cry of dissent.

"But surely your ideas have changed, for I hear some of you intend to return to the mills to-morrow."

"Only because we are forced to." The murmur was small, for most of them were still holding out.

"Do as you will," continued Gandhiji. "But no one can force you to do a thing that is wrong. For my own part, I still think your demands were just. I cannot give in. I have decided to touch no food until your request for a 33 per cent. increase is granted."

The news spread like wildfire over the city. The mill-owners loved Gandhiji. The whole city was proud of him. Could they let him starve? He would never break his word, that they knew. Within three days the strike was over. The 33 per cent. increase was given. The industry continued to flourish.

A CONVERSATION WITH GANDHIJI

Something abominably stiffnecked in my nature seems always to hold me back from assuming the attitude of veneration towards my fellow-humans, Indian or otherwise. Only good comradeship contents me, and comradeship implies mutual enjoyment. How can the great man, who is salaamed by prostrate admirers who take the dust from his feet, get any pleasure or profit from them? When his friends and helpers keep silence before him, listening with serious attention to all he says, without argument or contradiction, how sickly a proceeding it must be for him, and what an unusual relationship is created! What deadening boredom it must be! To know that seven or eight admirers, Indian and European, are squatting about in the darkness of the garden, listening to one's words of wisdom, must surely tempt any man who is still capable of sin, to despise them. If he avoids that rather venial form of sin, he might fall into the dangerous state of holding his own person in reverence.

Such were my reflections after being in Gandhiji's Ashram for a few days. It was obvious that he was the humblest of men. It was not mere imagination that detected pain as well as patience in his expression, when, during the sunset walk, a stranger

would dart out into the middle of the road and bow himself until he touched the great man's feet, craving his blessing. He reminded me of one of the statues in St. Peter's of a holy man in the prime of life, a priest of wisdom, discernment and humility, turning away from the invitation proffered him, with the words—*non volo episcopari*.

I had come some thousands of miles to see Gandhiji. He left his spinning-wheel to greet me on my arrival, with a handshake of real friendship. He had garlanded me a few hours later, adorning me with the necklace of marigolds that had been presented to him earlier in the day in honour of his birthday. In the evening he had taught me how to squat on the verandah, while Mrs. Gandhi fed us both with fruit. He had shown himself the simplest and friendliest of men, but during the succeeding weeks I could not bring myself to go to his room for a talk.

It seemed to me that some people wanted him to solve the very mystery of their souls, and explain to them the riddle of the universe. I grew tired of hearing the question put, "What does Bapu¹ think about it?" People were altogether too anxious to bombard him with their problems. My foolish reaction to this was a stubborn refusal to lift a finger to arrange a talk with him, and one could not get it except by arrangement, as his programme is to

¹ Bapu means Father, and is the name used for Gandhiji by all the Ashram inmates.

work in his room all the time he is not actually engaged with visitors.

I joined the big group of Ashram people, however, who took the sunset walk together, and I used to go with him for the morning swim with the boys of the school. I had my meals on his verandah with all the other guests, and I entertained on my verandah countless visitors of his whom he used to send to me. They were total strangers and would stand silent beneath my gate, watching my lamentable attempts to spin, until, as the yarn broke for the third time in three minutes, I would look up in shame and catch their eye. Thereupon they would salaam politely, and we would begin to talk.

But I rarely talked with my host. Once I contracted a slight illness, and he came to look at my tongue twice a day. He ordained a fast, and as I recovered speedily and became ravenous, I used to direct my conversational efforts solely to a reasoned pleading for food, which proved vain.

Meanwhile, I was learning a great deal from his friends and colleagues, Shanker Lal Banker and Anasuya Sarabhai. We would drive and walk, shop and chat by the hour. They showed me the sights of Ahmedabad, introduced me to Hindu home-life, took me to the Hindu festival, where the high-born ladies of the city joined together in a great ceremonial dance. They invited me to delightful dinners, at which the food had a piquant flavour, no small boon to any guest of Gandhiji. They never wearied

of asking for more details of the English equivalent of their movement, and I would tell them stories from my own experience with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, tales of George Davies and his attempts at spiritual direct action, and the adventures of the Brethren of the Common Table.

The three of us had so many interests and aims in common that it was sheer joy to be in each others' company. We compared notes on almost every subject under the sun. They told me of the building up of the All-India Spinning Association; of their early adventures, and of how both of them had broken away from luxurious homes in order to throw in their lot with the workmen; of how Gandhiji had strengthened their initial zeal, and had shown them better channels along which to work; and of their complete happiness and fullness of life ever since they had begun to follow this way of living.

One night, I was talking of an adventure we had had in Bow, when Anasuya said: "This is just the sort of thing Gandhiji would like to hear. Why do you never tell him these stories?" Then I had to confess my complex, and reveal my stiffnecked objection to arranging an interview with him, my determination not to discourse with him while six or seven people sat around in the background, silently drinking in his words of wisdom. They laughed at my gaucherie, and recounted what he had said to them that very morning: "What is this English lady who stays in her room all the time and

never comes and talks to me?" "But I can't go and make up a subject to talk about," I objected. "I am not conscious of any overwhelming desire to put complicated situations before him for his inspection and solution. All I should want to do would be to contradict him, even when I really agreed, because I feel it would be such a nice change for him. I want to make him forget his weighty responsibilities and laugh. I don't want to be soulful."

"Of course you don't," they agreed. "He always laughs with us, and we will arrange to be there if you will only go. Now do promise you will."

Next day I went. His room is large and low, furnished with a bench, a stool and a spinning-wheel, and an eighteen-inch-high writing-desk, at which he squats on the ground. By now I had learnt to squat in comfort, and desiring to show off my proficiency in the national attitude of repose, I seated myself on the ground in front of him. He looked at me with intense amusement, and grinning broadly in return, I blurted out the question: "Bapu, please will you come to England?"

"What would be the good?" he replied. "We here in India have not yet experienced such success with our non-resistance methods as to justify my coming to England to tell you good people there anything that would be of use to you."

I rocked back on my heels, the better to regard his face. "But I don't want you to come to England to teach us," I assured him.

"No?" he queried tentatively. "And what is it you want me to come for?"

"I want you to come over to England to learn from us," I announced. His face glowed with delight. "Quite right, quite right," he ejaculated. "It would give me great joy to meet your people, to talk with your stalwarts, and to exchange experiences with George Davies and others. Very well, then, I will come to England."

"That's good," I exclaimed.

"But on conditions," he announced.

"Tell them to me, please," I requested him.

"There are three," he answered. "I will come to England if you can persuade the cotton spinners of Manchester not to ship any more of their manufactured goods to India."

"I know a few of them," said I laughingly. "So at least I can pass on your request to them. Is the second condition any easier?"

"The second is that you should persuade your Cabinet Ministers and your Members of Parliament to give India Swaraj."

"And what is the third?" I asked, and could see that he was going to talk seriously this time.

He made a little pause, and then answered in measured and deliberate tone, "I will come to England if, when you go home, you will tell your fellow-countrymen what you have seen for yourself since you have mixed with our people. Tell them of the doped babies, and of the drinking habits of the

Untouchable children. Tell them that, though the Hindu and the Moslem religions forbid drinking, and it is against our instinct and our natural habits to touch alcohol, yet the habit is spreading wherever we mix with Europeans. Tell them that we have set our hearts on ridding the country both of opium and drink; that all parties and religions in India are agreed in this, but that nevertheless we cannot cope with this thing successfully because of revenue considerations. Tell them that under the Government of India Act, Excise has been transferred in such a way as to make the development of education and other nation-building services dependent upon the liquor revenue. Tell them that the opium evil is not nearly as serious as the drink evil. The opium addict only makes himself suffer. The drinker makes others suffer, generally women. Tell them that to us Indians it is as immoral to run a state on the proceeds of drink as it would be to you to run it on the proceeds of legalised prostitution. Stir up public opinion, convert Cabinet Ministers, and convince Members of Parliament; rouse the Churches, and make the whole nation see that they must no longer obstruct our national passion for Prohibition. As soon as you let me know that you have done this thing, I will come at my own expense, with ten million signatures of my countrymen, to complete the great work."

There was silence.

At length I said, "I rather think I'll have a shot at that job."

AN OPIUM SHOP IN DELHI

In Delhi I met Miss Jane Campbell, a woman so devoted to the people of India, that in recognition of her long years of service the King bestowed on her the Kaiser-i-Hind medal.

She took me to the opium shops and gained permission from the licensee for us to stand and watch his customers make their purchases. I imagined they would be resentful at our presence, but on the contrary they seemed to understand and even share our concern at the baleful effect of the various drugs sold to them.

After making their purchases they lingered still, so that soon a little group had formed, watching us intently. Miss Campbell felt it incumbent upon her to explain our position more fully, so she turned to them with the inimitable friendliness which characterises her, and began to tell them why we were there. I could not understand, of course, the language she used, but I saw that they were gripped by the sincerity of her personality.

"This lady", she began, pointing to me, "comes from a country where there are no shops licensed by the Government for the sale of opium." All eyes were fixed on me with that direct and grave look that one sees all the time in India. There were exclamations of surprise that a country should exist

which was free of opium shops. Addicts themselves, they knew the evil effects of the drug, and inquired where this happy land was situated. England? But was it not the English Government which sold the licenses to the shopkeepers? Insoluble puzzle! As she continued her talk, every now and then a new purchaser would approach the shop and, forgetting his errand, take his place in the little crowd facing us. It was a terrible sight, this group of eager listeners. At intervals one of them would interrupt Miss Campbell with some question or difficulty. "Miss Sahib, I only take it because of my cough. I have a very bad cough," volunteered one frail old man.

"If that's so, I can give you something that will ease it better than opium," she said.

"Can you, Miss Sahib?" he queried eagerly, and there was a general surge forward of the crowd. She scribbled her address on a scrap of paper and handed it to the old man, saying: "Come to my house to-morrow afternoon for the medicine." Joyfully he took the paper, and immediately several others stretched out their bony arms. "Me too, Miss Sahib, let me come to your house also. I need medicine too."

She turned to me hurriedly. "I've never been in a situation like this before. Quick, give me more paper. It's a marvellous opportunity."

"I ache all over, Miss Sahib," said the next addict. "Every time I come here to buy the

stuff I am worse afterwards, but I cannot help coming."

"We are weak of will," said a third. "So long as these places are open we can't keep away."

"Save us, Miss Sahib," begged another, and soon the cry: "Save us, Miss Sahib," was taken up by all the others.

Miss Campbell's eyes were tearful. We both felt impotent, yet somehow responsible in face of the abject misery, the wasted limbs, and burning eyes of these men.

"I can't save you," she said. "Only Allah can save you." And she put her hands into the attitude of prayer.

"Only Allah!" they echoed, and assumed the position of prayer themselves, waiting for what should come next.

"But you must all do what you can," continued Miss Campbell, "to make people see that it is an evil thing; and this lady and I will do all *we* can." Once more they turned and fixed their solemn gaze upon me, as if expecting me to suggest something.

"I have little influence," I said, and Miss Campbell interpreted my halting words. "But I will tell people in England what I have seen here and ask them to help. Anyhow, I promise that every day I will pray for you."

That seemed to mean a good deal to them, and one lifted up his voice and spoke for the rest: "We

pray God's blessing on you, Miss Sahib, if you can do anything to save us." Their steady, searching regard remained fixed on me in silence, as a policeman bustled up to point out that the trams, and all the rest of the traffic, in the narrow winding street, were being disorganised because of this illegal concourse on the pavement.

So we all moved away.

We went that day to several shops, and outside one of them saw a twelve-year-old boy, who was carrying a tiny baby sister.

"Son, you're not going to tell me that you take any of this poisonous stuff?" Miss Campbell said.

Two rows of very white teeth were suddenly displayed in a wide grin. "Of course not, Miss Sahib. I never take it. I'm only buying it for the baby."

Later, an Indian friend told me how one morning the sound of a child's cry was so persistent that after an hour or two she could bear it no longer. It came from the house next door, and although she did not know the lady who lived there, she called to inquire if there were any trouble in which her help would be useful.

"Oh, thank you, no," answered the other woman. "There's nothing wrong at all. The baby's only crying because the opium has run out, and the shops don't open until this afternoon. She is missing her usual dose."

Subsequently I called on the wife of one of the Provincial Governors, who is greatly interested in

the opium problem. She gave me various pamphlets and reports, from which I gleaned this piece of information: "It is computed that among the women workers in the cotton mills of Bombay 98 per cent. dope their babies regularly every morning before they set out for work."

THE GURUKULA

One of my fellow-guests at the Ashram was a young professor from an Indian religious college up in the North, which was, of course, quite unknown to me.

We had many long talks in which we exchanged ideas and experiences. After a few days he began to say: "Principal Ram Deva would be interested to hear that!" or "That's how we feel at the Gurukula." This sort of recognition of our way of looking at things never used to surprise me, but apparently it filled the Indians with amazement to discover that the teaching and practice of the ethics of Jesus were leading us to the same goal that Gandhiji was pointing out to them.

"I shall write to my Principal", he said one day. "He will want you to be our guest. Will you please arrange to come to us?"

I knew little of this college, and felt small inclination to go, but everyone urged me, and the tone in which people spoke of the place soon made me realise that it was a chance I should be foolish to let slip. It was described as a Monastery-University. How then could I go? Oh, that would be managed. Booklets were shown me, describing the visit of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald years before. I heard that the college was the heart of the Arya Samaj, that powerful religious society that is supposed by many

people to be the seat of most of the Anti-Christian propaganda. I was shown the Quarterly Magazine issued by its Principal. That certainly seemed to delight in demonstrating the ignorance and follies of Christians.

Then I heard of the wild beauties of the district: how the journey included crossing two or three tributaries of the Ganges, high up towards its source in the Himalayas, and how one went through the jungle for hours; but always the conversation ended with an adjuration to go.

So we set out one night from Delhi, and in the morning found ourselves in Hardwar. The air was cool and clean, and the sun shone on hundreds of pilgrims fulfilling the hope, cherished probably throughout the whole of their lives, of bathing ceremonially in the Ganges at this holy place, before they died. We were taken for our meal to the big school, which is the Junior section of the Arya Samaj Institution. They take boys of eight, and like them to stay for fifteen years without going home at all. They seemed jolly enough, though, as they crowded round us and asked questions, which had to be translated. They escorted me to their kitchen, where, of course, I had to take off my shoes before I could go in and admire the stove, where three hundred hot chapatties¹ were being prepared for the midday meal. A little hut with barred and unglazed windows was put at our disposal. Here we took our rest before

¹ Chapatties = flat bread pancakes.

the remainder of the journey, and here we left our boxes and everything we could possibly do without for three days, for it was not likely to be easy going.

I felt ashamed to let three meagre-limbed old men carry a wooden chair plus my weight over a rocky river-bed; and when they continued to carry me after we had reached the other side, I called to them to put me down, for I was more capable of walking than they. But they only thought I was saying I was uncomfortable, and proceeded to carry the poles of the chair more carefully. My friends were in front now, out of earshot, and I despaired of getting the old men free of their burden. I gesticulated and made signs determinedly, and at length, though still not understanding, they put me down to discover the cause of my discomfort. Once down, I could get out and walk, though still unable to explain my dislike of burdening them further.

Up and up through the jungle we went, till another stream had to be crossed. Here, however, I could ford it on foot. But at the next river other means had to be provided. A home-made raft of petrol-tins fastened together with bamboo was awaiting us, and we paddled merrily across the swift-flowing water, though we had been a little apprehensive before embarkation, hearing that the paddle-man had sometimes to jump overboard and pull the raft along by a rope as he swam. On landing, there was another long walk through the jungle, but

we knew that this was the last stage of the journey. Its tedious length was beguiled by a native policeman, who, riding on a huge white horse, overtook us. He was attended by a jolly little chap walking in front. He dismounted and offered me his horse, left me in charge of the boy, and walked ahead with my companions.

We reached the village at last, and here we had to stop as usual, to see the signs of reviving handicrafts, the spinning-wheel and the weaving-shed. Soon we came to the extensive College grounds. The gardener took us into his hut and gave us sticks of sugar-cane to eat. Thus revived, we eventually reached the Gurukula, where, on the outskirts of the garden, a little pavilion was made ready for me, a bathroom prepared, and a table spread with dainties.

It was a time of festivity in the Hindu Calendar, and we were given a truly wonderful entertainment. There were sports of all sorts. Football was their favourite game, and they played well. Throughout the match the Principal walked about with me, telling me stories of the past, legends and facts, tales of the mystics and the like, and explained to me why and how certain of his convictions had been formed. We tried to analyse together the source of bitterness, fear, exclusiveness and narrowness.

He asked me to address all the students, and take as long as I liked over it. I hesitated, wondering if my Christian convictions might not clash with the

policy of the College. He brushed all such notions aside. "Say whatever is in your heart to say. We want to hear." So, at the Annual Meeting that afternoon, at which there were reports, music and speeches, lasting for about two hours, I spoke of some of the attempts our group in Bow had made to translate into everyday life the teaching of Jesus Christ, to whom we were wholly devoted. Afterwards, there were fireworks in abundance, and myriads of tiny fairy lights pricked out every roof and outline of the College buildings, sheds, library and museum. We sat in rows on the ground in the moonlight, enjoying exquisite food provided for us on brass plates.

Next day the Principal came to say he was expecting me to dinner in his own house.

"But I must admit that my little daughter is amazed," he added.

"Why?" I asked.

"She says: 'After all you have told me about English people, I do not think you ought to ask this lady into our house.'"

I paused before replying. I felt rather grave at this revelation of his attitude.

"Well?" I queried.

"Oh, please come," he said. "My wife and I greatly desire your company; the child is wrong."

"But didn't you give her her ideas?" I inquired as we set out.

Every day there were two long periods of devotion,

in the morning on the flat roof, and at evening in the courtyard. We all squatted in a circle round a fire, and while hymns were sung and prayers repeated for about three-quarters of an hour, the Principal from time to time poured ghi¹ and cleansing herbs on to the fire, to symbolise the cleansing of our hearts by sacrifice.

On the afternoon after the Festival, the Principal asked me to speak again. What I had said was just the sort of thing his students liked, just what he wanted them to hear. He had taken the liberty of asking them to come and call on me, as he wished them to learn as much as possible of what people of the sort I described were doing in England. Meanwhile, would I write for his Quarterly Journal? Anything I liked to say he would publish, whether it were a criticism or appreciation of the College, my own ideas, or accounts of my work. From that moment until I left there was little leisure, for the students took full advantage of the invitation.

¹ Ghi = melted butter.

WEARING THE SARI IN AGRA

One of the Professors at the National College near the Ashram, hearing I wanted to visit Agra, procured an invitation for me to visit his brother and sister-in-law, who lived in that city.

My young hostess was a bride of eighteen, an enthusiastic volunteer. Her husband spent all his energies in organising schools for Untouchables, and in carrying out Gandhiji's programme of social service. The capacity of her house had to be stretched to its utmost to accommodate us. We would climb the winding staircase of white stone from the courtyard, where we squatted for our meals, to the roof, where the sitting-room and tiny bedroom were, and from which we could see the dignified mother-in-law below, superintending the labours of her servant, and renewing each day the precious holy corner of her courtyard. There, on one of the paving stones, she had drawn intricate designs in chalk, placed earth and clay in certain positions, and offered flowers and other little symbols of piety. "All that ritual is most precious to her," explained my young hostess pensively. Then suddenly her eyes lit up. "Come and see my saris, sister," she said. She unlocked a door leading to an inner room, where dozens of these beautiful garments were

folded away in boxes—silk saris, muslin saris, plain and embroidered saris, saris of every imaginable hue, but every one a Khaddar sari, hand-spun and hand-woven.

“My dear! Why so many?” I exclaimed.

Her eyes danced. “My mother gave me them at my marriage.”

“How many have you?” I asked.

“Forty. Choose one, sister. Which do you like best?”

There was no doubt in my mind: a salmon-coloured one with a broad black border, exquisitely embroidered in bold-coloured fine silk.

“Take that, then. My mother embroidered it, every inch of it, while she was in jail. You know she was there for two years, a political prisoner. Will you put it on, sister?”

She draped me and swathed me and twisted me, until I could scarcely walk for the bunch round my ankles, or breathe for the wrappings round my waist. The head-covering, which fell loose to the shoulder on one side, necessitated a constant bobbing of the head to readjust its weight. This movement the Indians perform unconsciously, but to a foreigner it is reminiscent of the discomfort of a horse in a bearing-rein.

I wanted to disrobe, but I saw that my hostess delighted to see me in the national dress. It was certainly very becoming, as well as utterly beautiful in itself.

"You will come to the Taj in it, sister?" she said tentatively.

I had to say: "Of course."

On our first visit to the Taj Mahal the previous day, as we walked by the artificial pools of water between the avenues, towards that most perfect monument of man's love and man's skill, people had nudged one another, nodding and whispering to all: "Look, a wearer of Khaddar walking with an Englishwoman!" When we came to the Taj itself, the Moslem official had assured me that it was quite unnecessary for me to remove my shoes. This seemed to me an unpleasant differentiation of treatment, and I had insisted on paying the customary honour to a holy place. He had persevered, however, in giving me privileges, addressing his explanatory remarks obviously to my ears, and waving back sundry humble Indians who were as eager as I was to see one of their national titles to fame.

But on this second visit I was not bothered at all by being offered preferential treatment. The official saw my sari; that was enough for him. Let me take my chance now with the others; shoes off, keep to the rules. I was one of the crowd.

That afternoon, as we sat at tea in the courtyard, a car drew up to the door. Two men whom I had met during the morning came up with an invitation. They were the local candidate at the forthcoming election for the Provincial Assembly and his friend. They had heard I was interested in village life, and

as they were going out to canvas, and to hold a meeting some twenty miles away, they wondered whether I would care to accompany them. Rapid conversations in an unknown tongue ensued, and I knew that they were concerned wholly with the usual difficulties of companionship between Hindus and Europeans: food, sleeping accommodation, washing utensils and sanitary arrangements.

When reassurance had been given on all these points, they asked if I would like to go, and, acting on my predetermined habit of always saying "Yes" to anything suggested, I accepted. If I had not arranged this policy before I landed in India, I should often have held back from good opportunities, and certainly in this case I should have refused. I was totally uninterested in the election. It was already near evening, and my young hostess could not come with me. I was still wearing her sari and the red circular caste-mark she had painted between my eyes. The motor was small and the destination unknown, but evidently far off.

"We expect to be back before nightfall" was the surprising farewell I heard them shout to my hostess, as we lurched forward, seven of us crowded in a car for five.

But it was past nightfall when we reached the town where the meeting was to be held. A hitch had occurred. The candidate's arrival was unheralded. The meeting had not been called, and the town was silent. By starlight we picked our way along a cobble-

stoned path, holding on to each other in our eagerness to avoid falling into the little gully cut in the midst of it. The candidate was an easygoing, cheery sort of person whom nothing daunted. He led his party on until we reached an unobtrusive doorway. This door was at length opened, to disclose darkness pierced only in one corner, where a little rushlight shone. By the light of this, the owner had been casting up his accounts.

He was a successful banker, I afterwards discovered, though I had mistaken him for the penurious caretaker of an empty house. We were all invited in and made to sit down. On *what*, I never knew, for it was too dark. Messengers were dispatched in all directions. Meanwhile, the conversation suddenly assumed that serious, worried tone which told me they were discussing my comfort, bless them! Then they addressed me. Would I mind staying the night? I thought of my sari and gasped. Happily the darkness shrouded my rueful anticipation of having to cope with those six yards of material, wound round and round in so many and such diverse folds and creases. They continued soothingly. There was the guest-house where we could all be put up quite easily if I would consent. If not, of course, we could return at once and leave the candidate behind for the meeting, but in that case I should miss all the canvassing which would take place next day, and the visits to the smaller outlying villages on the way home,

I answered mechanically according to plan, but I did not relish the affair. Besides the sari difficulty, there would be no toothbrush. Certainly, some weeks previously, two Indian friends had been painstaking in their efforts to teach me how to clean my teeth Hindu fashion. They had brought me the twig from the special tree appointed for this purpose. I had chewed the end of it obediently until it had frayed out into something in the likeness of a brush. I had followed their instructions and massaged my palate, my gums and my tongue with the queer little tool, constantly losing track of it meanwhile, so that bits of its peel came adrift in my mouth. I had looked up in despair, but their grave regard had not relaxed. "That is right, sister; now spit it out." But that had been beyond me. The window out of which I should have spat was unglazed and near, but I have never acquired any precision in the art of spitting. I had retrieved the bits of peel in my handkerchief, and tried the up-and-down movement necessary to cleanse the teeth. Alas! By now my stick was *hors de combat*, and I threw it out of the window, deciding to cleave to my celluloid toothbrush. It seems strange that anyone could make the use of a toothbrush an integral part of his morning's worship, yet every day I have watched the Hindus wield their twig for twelve minutes, blending their ablutions with their prayers.

The messengers returned at last, and bade us to the market-place.

"You will say something, sister, won't you? I hope so. I will translate," said the candidate, and led me to one of the two chairs on an improvised platform, in front of which squatted hundreds of men. I told them something of the struggles, ideals and aspirations of the common people of England and how, little by little, through their energy, courage, co-operation and public spirit they were winning for themselves a better sort of life.

It seemed like midnight, though it could not have been, when at last we were free to go back to the dimly lit shanty that had sheltered us before the meeting. But what a change had come over it! One always judges wrongly if one judges by appearances in India.

We were led through a courtyard into a dining-room, where pillars upheld an arched roof, and we squatted in great comfort, our backs to the wall, while servants brought food of the utmost delicacy. We were all hungry, and in high spirits as a result of the successful meeting, and we laughed, told stories and cracked jokes with great gaiety. Then once more we all trooped out to the guest-house, where the men slept on the floor of a spacious room, and I rejoiced in the possession of a proper bed in the tiny room adjoining.

It took me a long while to take off my sari. I unwound only a few inches at a time, always putting it back as it was, to be sure I had mastered its in-

tricacies, before I dared unpeel another half-yard or so. However, I dressed myself quite creditably on the morrow, and was ready to keep an appointment arranged the night before, to meet one of the chief men of the town at his house. I was to be introduced to his mother and his wife, in that order of precedence, and to take breakfast there, after examining some of C. F. Andrews's letters that he thought would interest me.

Canvassing in the villages on the way home was interesting, though I could not appreciate very well the rival policies of the different candidates. The poverty of the villagers was the glaring reality, and I feared that the introduction of Western election methods would not do much to lessen the evil.

My hostess was glad to welcome her husband and her guest back, and congratulated me on the way in which I had coped with my sari.

A HINDU REVIVAL MISSION

My host, the Superintendent of Police in a certain district of Bengal, handed me a printed invitation card with my name on it:

The pleasure of your company is requested at B—— to witness the ceremony of the initiation into Hinduism of ten thousand converted Aborigines (Santals, etc.).

“Shall we go?” he inquired. “It’s only a three-hour train journey. We could stay at the Dak Bungalow. My wife thinks you would be interested, and she knows *she* would. It’s a great opportunity. Such a thing has never taken place in this part of the world before. This movement of conversion is quite a new thing. Hitherto, Hindus have refused to do propaganda.”

“I should like to go,” I said. “But what are they being converted from? Islam or Christianity, or the aboriginal tribal religions?”

“I’ve no idea,” answered the Superintendent, whose mind ran on other lines.

Next day we set out, my host and his wife, their little girl, several servants, and I. The Dak Bungalows are charming places to stay in, all necessities being provided, and well-cooked food obtainable. Two or three bedrooms are available, but one brings one’s own sheets and blankets. A little dining-

room and a pleasant garden are put at one's disposal by a Government anxious to make its officials comfortable.

As soon as we arrived, queer strident music fell upon our ears. Was it the glory-song of the converted, or the converters' hymn of triumph? In any case, it sounded extremely ugly, and soon unpleasantly loud, as a whole crowd of slightly worried-looking people were led into the bungalow garden, and formed into a circle, which revolved interminably outside the front door. Presumably they were the first-fruits of the converted band. Two or three were throwing themselves about with the fervour of their emotion, singing and shouting. It was one of the most unpleasant spectacles I witnessed in India. Apparently, these were the hysterical ones trying to work up a feeling of elation in the rest, who possessed too much native dignity to be able to emulate them successfully, although they made one or two abortive efforts to do so.

I was relieved when they tossed and curveted themselves outside the gate once more. Almost immediately four or five pompous-looking, saffron-robed individuals entered the garden, salaamed, and took the empty deck-chairs beside ours on the verandah. These were the priests and leaders of the Mission, and they were thoroughly pleased with its success. I felt inimical to them from the start, for several reasons, both foolish and sound. First, they were fat. Should a holy man be fat in India, or

anywhere? I think not. Secondly, they were tall and dignified, and gazed about them with a smug expression, as though assured that everyone would be pleased to welcome them. Does not this attitude preclude humility, as well as the joy of wonder? Thirdly, they kept themselves apart from their converts, and talked about them as though they were of different clay, just as the old-fashioned type of social worker used to talk of the people among whom he worked.

They seemed to want my opinion of the proceedings, and as it was difficult to give this politely, I took refuge in asking questions.

"From what are these aboriginals converted?" I asked.

"Various religions," answered the portly one.

"Were any of them Christians?"

"I think so, some of them."

"What Mission Church?"

"I don't know."

"Anyhow, Christians would have troubled to talk to them in their own language."

"Oh, I have assistants who translate."

"But how can you show your brotherliness if you can't talk to them? To be one with the people is our idea of religion."

(Quite unperturbed.) "We shall wait on them at the great feast to-morrow. We shall not treat them as Untouchables. We shall feed them and minister to them."

"So far so good. But not far enough in my opinion."

"Will you come and see the great kitchen we've set up?"

I went, and found it exceedingly well arranged. For Brahmins to welcome such men as brothers was of course a forward step, but I still felt inimical.

All night long the tom-tom thrummed. New converts kept arriving. Some had walked twelve miles to get to the meeting-place. Did they not deserve a little excitement in their welcome? Then let the song pierce the night's rest.

Next morning the ceremony was timed for 8 a.m. "That means we will leave the bungalow at 8.30 a.m.," said my host, and smiled at my look of surprise. Until now I had always stayed with Gandhiji's men who, like their leader, keep Western punctuality. I had not discovered the characteristic Indian weakness for the "extra half-hour", that much-prized margin which must always be taken into account when making any appointment. How the lack of it in Europe frets them! How easily one can recognise the point of view directly derivable from this conception of time! Several times since, in London, having planned every complicated detail for some big event, at which perhaps ten or twelve public men and women have arranged to be present, I have met at the last minute an Indian statesman in London and asked him to take part in the ceremony. Eager to do so, he has consulted his diary, found the

date engaged, and immediately proceeded to urge me in all seriousness to postpone the whole affair to the next day.

It was a queer thing to watch the organisation of this huge ceremony. In the midst of the vast enclosure was a flaming fire which each convert had to approach as a sign of cleansing. Then round a little open temple he must kneel, while the priest within read Sanskrit prayers. The aborigines tried hard to kneel properly, and their attitude was absolutely devout, but such a lot of demonstration and copying, and pushing and instruction was necessary before they could understand all that was required of them, that they looked rather more flurried than worshipful. Nevertheless, their simplicity and grace seemed to me to outshine anything we or the Hindus were manifesting in our attitude towards them.

They now passed in single file into a huge marquee, in which twelve hired clerks sat to take their names. At one end, five Hindu officials sat, each in his private compartment, partitioned off from the rest, and here the mark was put upon the foreheads of the converts, the words pronounced, and the blessing given that constituted them Hindus henceforth. A copy of the Bhagavadgita was put into their hands, and they were shepherded out of the marquee.

"Am I Hindu now?" one would ask.

"Yes, you are a Hindu now," the guide replied.

“Long live the Hindu religion!” The cry was started every now and then, but for the most part there was quietness, sobriety, and a sense of the seriousness of the occasion.

Each man was then given a small framed picture of Krishna. There followed an appetising dinner, after which a packet of cigarettes was handed to each, and they were harangued by the portly ones on their duties and privileges: to pray at sunrise and sunset; to protect the Hindu temples against all enemies; to give up alcoholic drinks, etc.

In the midst of the ceremony a table and chairs had been provided to serve my dinner in European style. As we sat eating, the crowd grew larger and larger. There was a bit of rising ground behind the table, and row upon row of serious-eyed faces was turned in troubled silence towards me. What was I, a white woman, a Christian, doing at their ceremony? Had I perhaps been converted too? If not, why had I a picture of Krishna? If so, why did I refuse the garland offered me in front of the temple? I longed to talk to them, but it was an awkward situation.

At length I begged a friend to translate, sentence by sentence, and turning to them I said: “I am glad to be with you all, to-day. I come from England, from the poor and humble people in England. I bring a message of love and friendship from them to you. We, happy in our religion, wish you happiness in yours.”

I sat down, very unsatisfied, but my audience moved away *en masse*, in silence and deep content.

"They are perfectly happy now," said my Indian friend.

That night those ten thousand simple souls started on their homeward journey, serious, sober and thoughtful as when they came.

HINDU VILLAGES

"Remember that India is a country of villages." With these words I was constantly warned not to imagine that the cities I visited were typical of Indian life. "The vast majority of our people are villagers. It is the condition of the peasant, the ryot, the countryman, that you ought to study." So wherever I was, I made a point of going out into the country districts around and keeping my eyes open.

"The poverty of our people is terrible," I was told everywhere. "It is computed that one-half of the ryots do not know the sensation of having a full stomach. They never experience it." I was told to read the revealing figures in the Report of the recent Royal Commission on Agriculture. I was told that the moneylenders have got the peasants so completely into their hands, that when harvest thanksgiving comes, and a good crop of rice enables them to pay off their debts, their relief is but short-lived. So enormous is the interest charged, 200 per cent., that to pay the debt in full most of the rice has to be sold. Often indeed, only three weeks after Harvest Home, the peasants' stock is depleted, and they are forced to have recourse again to the moneylenders, to enable them to buy back some of their own rice to keep themselves alive. I heard, too, of

the practice among the villagers of drinking enormous quantities of water to keep from them as long as possible the gnawing feeling of emptiness.

To whatever village my friends took me, the ryots welcomed me delightfully. The elders, grave-faced and dignified, did the honours of the place, and were always ready with a little speech before I left. The young ones, active and cheery, came running from the fields, and clambered up the hedgerows, lest I stayed in the car and they thus missed a sight of their strange visitor. For, seemingly, it was strange to them to find an Englishwoman in their midst, introduced by three or four of Gandhiji's men, who are easily recognised anywhere by their white Khaddar clothes. So they clustered into a crowded circle to hear, see and ponder.

Whilst my host talked, I studied the faces of the crowd. I could not understand his words, but I could tell the gist of them by the reaction of the people, and their treatment of me afterwards. "Here is a lady from England. She does not come from the Government or from a Society. No official has sent her. She has come because she loves our country and wants to be friends with us." Here they raised eyes full of delight and affection. "She is here only for a few months because in England she has many people to look after and work for. She lives among the working people of London, people like yourselves, people who know what poverty is, people who have to suffer as we do. She admires

our great leader Gandhiji, and she says many of her friends in England do also. Their spirit and his are one. She is sad for the sufferings of our country and wishes us well. Let us show her the school we have just started, the spinning-wheels and the weaving-sheds."

Conducted by the whole village, I looked at their objects of pride and watched their best scholar write his name triumphantly in my honour. I entered a mud-hut and saw the spinning they had done that week. The whole family's efforts produce perhaps fivepence, to be handed over to them by one of Gandhiji's Village Volunteers, who comes to their neighbourhood every seventh day. He collects the spun yarn, weighs it, tests it, gives out more raw cotton, makes any necessary repairs to the Tcherka, gives hints on sanitation, advice as to hygiene, and then hands over the money earned by the family labour.

Then the villagers crowded together again, and I spoke a few sentences, which were carefully translated and eagerly treasured. I thanked them, passed on to them the greetings and love that my friends at Bow had sent them, and said "God bless you."

The aged chief then got up, and in beautiful, sounding phrases said sweet and terrible things to me that were duly translated, so that I wanted to apologise to the old man for being so comfortable and so impotent. But that was nonsense, so I salaamed profoundly, and went away with the words ringing

in my ears, I suppose, for ever: "We are very proud that Miss Sahib should come here out of the excessive kindness of her heart. She has come among us in blessedness and joy. We look to her as to a god. We have shown her our best, and we hope she will remember our wretchedness when she returns to her own land. We ask her to pray that our poverty may be eased. All we can do is to pray her to ask her Government to improve our lot. And so we say 'Farewell and Salaam!'"

Obviously the villagers of India are under-nourished. I recognised the look which I saw on the faces of the mothers and fathers. As they smiled at me and showed me things, their faces were charming and happy in animation, but as soon as their expression became composed, as soon as they were freed from the duty of polite entertainment of an honoured guest, their look changed. The lines of their faces became set in that expression of anxiety which is the same all the world over, peculiar to those men and women who have helpless ones dependent on them whose clamant needs they cannot satisfy.

All around the Indian villages there is dug a narrow, shallow trench about six inches across. "No man who has gone out and drunk must cross this line on his return unless he is entirely sober." There are numberless village-sanctions of this sort to preserve the home-life and the simple habits of the people. That is why Western industrialism is working such havoc among the population of India.

The villagers have to leave home if they enter the factories, and once the young men are deprived of the sanctions operative in the villages they have nothing else to help them keep strong in the face of temptation. Yet more and more go away into industry. The comparatively high wages tempt them, and no wonder, when they can see their home-life ruined by debt. Nevertheless, the mothers would prefer to keep them at home, out of the way of those fierce struggles that await them in the towns.

There is a saying, apparently ubiquitous, but attributable to no one in particular: "If you do European work, you must take European drink." The Indians stand out against it at first, but its constant repetition acts as a suggestion of inevitability, and Indian parents become increasingly embittered as their sons contract European habits of drinking. Death were infinitely preferable, for, to the Hindu, even the moderate drinker is a sinner.

Close to my little house in Shantiniketan there was a village belonging to the Santals, one of the aboriginal races. On my evening walks across the plain I had to pass it daily, braving the barking watchdog, who spied me long before I came near; and often throughout the night the sound of the tom-tom's unfailing regularity mingled with my dreams as well as with my waking thoughts.

The Santals, I was told, used to be great hunters. Their men prided themselves on their skill in the chase, and their women cooked the flesh and dressed

the hides. When there were no longer any wild creatures to hunt, they wandered about, still carrying their spears, confused in their minds as to what they ought to do.

Factories and mills were opening in the district, but they could not imagine themselves doing sedentary work. For a Santal, sitting or standing still all day, and fiddling about with little switches, meant to deny one's manhood. To pull little levers and to turn handles was child's-play, but possibly suitable for women. And the women decided to go. Day by day one could see outside the factory gates the arrival of the Santal women, each gravely conducted by her husband, carrying his spear.

Something about the village fascinated me. It was a straggling line of tiny mud-huts, with the path between trodden hard. A big circle of palm-trees enclosed it. It was on the edge of a vast level plain, seamed with cracks, almost treeless and bushless, over which I used to tramp alone about sunset, when the cool of the evening came. Except for myself there was no one but an occasional Santal returning from work. Strange tricks the light played. I remember once gazing due west to where the great ball of red was dropping behind a far-off clump of trees. At the same moment it happened that half-way between the trees and myself a farm-cart passed slowly across my line of vision. The slow and heavy tread of the bullocks disturbed the thick dust of the road, and its myriad specks rose all around them, a fiery glow

beneath the palm branches, turning the dust into glory. When the sun had disappeared I turned to face north. As I stared into the strange dark distances of the plain I was dreaming and wondering what was beyond the unfathomable darkness, when I was suddenly aware of something happening on my right. It was as though a conjurer were tossing up a ball of fire into the air. I turned due east, and there, red as blood, was the moon, its rise giving an effect of speed and hurry that was queerly surprising.

One night the tom-toms had a note of urgency about them. It was a festival, we were told; so four of us turned up at eight o'clock at night in the middle of the tiny village, to see if we should be in the way or welcomed. Immediately, without any interruption of the proceedings, two beds were brought out for us to sit on.

Three elders were presiding over a concourse of the whole community. Row behind row in a great ring squatted young and old, men and women, listening to the story of "How man came to be". It was necessarily a very long story, but the attention was rapt except for occasional interludes, when it was deemed advisable to make a break for the young people to move their positions a little. On occasions, too, the second old man of the trio would suddenly burst into impassioned song, rather like a singer at a Revivalist meeting. At its close, the story-teller continued his tale.

After a long spell, a dance intervened, if the word

"dance" really describes the Santals' religious observance. So slow was the motion of the men and women, so bounded by the circle were their steps, so linked arm by arm was the entire company, that its mystic significance alone held us back from boredom. After a time, however, we saw a couple appear in the moonlight at the far end of the village. They must have slipped away unseen from the circle. Dancing together, graceful and absorbed in their own slow movements, they approached by infinitesimal degrees the main group, who continued to be intent on their own steps, but were obviously aware of the approach of the couple and awaited their arrival with something of awe.

In the centre of the ring was an object of veneration, covered by a cloth. Every now and then someone would approach it or stretch out a hand towards it, but it was never uncovered, and we got no answer to our question as to what it was. Probably the branch of a tree, my wise companion told me.

After a time, the telling of the story was resumed, but we were too sleepy to wait until the end of the history of the human race. The sound of the tom-toms continued until the coming of dawn summoned the villagers back to their daily work.

It is to the villages one must turn if one desires to know the heart of India. In their sanctions, in their schools, in their old-time habits, in their new-found aspirations lies the key to the understanding of the Indian mind.

STAYING WITH RABINDRANATH
TAGORE

Shanti, Shanti, Shanti. This is how I remember my visit to Shantineketan. To be a guest of the Poet, Rabindranath Tagore, meant a series of long, uneventful and beautiful days. At twenty-past six each morning a deep-toned bell announced to all of us, students, scholars and visitors alike, the time for prayer. I used to make my way to the garden, by the boarding-house where the girls congregated, and at the end of ten minutes' silence sentences were repeated in Bengali, always ending with the word "Shanti" repeated three times—Peace, Peace, Peace.

Then one opened one's eyes on a world of level surfaces, apparently unbroken in every direction. Here and there stood the various school buildings, the boys' sleeping-sheds, the dining-hall, the girls' boarding-house, the beautiful building designed to house the library on the ground floor and to provide a big School of Art upstairs. At its entrance was a wide portico, from which steps led down to the open space, where the whole community gathered together for worship. Slow-moving professors were assembling, boys and girls were waiting, and students roamed about with gay-coloured blankets round their shoulders, for the sun had not yet risen. At length came the greeting of the Dawn, when some

six or seven students, both men and women, stood in the portico facing us all and sang one of the Poet's compositions in those strange Eastern cadences that have the power to haunt the ear of the unwary Westerner ever afterwards.

Then work began.

Dotted about over the College grounds were many little houses, where teachers and professors lived. Scholars from distant parts of the world enrich the students and themselves by accepting the Poet's hospitality. In the guest-house for occasional visitors there is a notice pinned up in the Hall: "No worship is allowed here but that of the Supreme Being".

The Temple stands in a central position, a small octagonal building of painted iron and coloured glass, empty of all furniture and decoration except for the intricate designs drawn in white chalk on the highly polished tiles of the floor. A flight of steps surrounds the Temple and leads up to its several entrances. On one occasion the place was thronged. The Poet himself was to lead the worship. The men went inside while we squatted on the steps. The service was spoken in Bengali; it consisted mainly of prayers, the singing of the Poet's hymns, and an address by him which seemed inordinately long. The sense of tedium I felt, however, was obviously due to my ignorance of Bengali, and to Western knees and ankles inept at squatting. Everyone else seemed happy and refreshed.

This service was held two days after Dr. Tagore's

return from his notable visit to Europe, during which Mussolini had entertained him in Italy with lavish hospitality amid a nation's welcome to his poetic genius. After the highly honoured guest had moved to his next host in a neighbouring country things were said which wounded Italian susceptibilities. Relations became strained. Soon the Italian professor who was living at Shantineketan, lecturing to the students on history, returned to his native land. The charming little house that had been put at his disposal stood empty, and eventually became my home for the three or four weeks of my visit. I imagine it was unpleasant for him to have to leave it, for whatsoever reason; its charm was memorable. It stood away from the other College buildings, near the primitive village where the Santals lived. Through the doors which opened on to the verandah on every side one walked out into solitude. In the cool of the evening school-boys could be seen playing football with the Santal boys, and a little hut had been put up where the girls met the Santal girls to teach them needlework.

There was only one disadvantage in being so far from the centre of the school: the night watchman or policeman responsible for the orderliness of the district felt it incumbent upon him to awaken somebody to prove that he had done his duty and visited the community, thus ensuring its safety. So one night, in the small hours, with his stout staff he banged at our door until we awoke, and then pro-

ceeded volubly to take a great deal of credit to himself for his presence with us. Although we could not reciprocate his pleasant feelings, he refused to go until we had lit a lamp and signed our names on his greasy bit of paper. He seemed to think that this would set him up immensely in the eyes of the official world, and departed unrepentant and singing lustily.

Near the school buildings stands a well-built house where the great friend of India, C. F. Andrews, has rooms. "Do you know what his initials stand for?" ask his Indian admirers naïvely.

"His name," one supposes.

"No, more than that," they answer. "We think C.F.A. means 'Christ's faithful apostle.'"

The loveliest building is the Poet's own house, made of soft red stone. It is very small and of perfect design, with long open corridors of stone leading from room to room, which form as they meet each other a perfect stage for the setting of his dramas.

He was away during the first part of my visit to Shantineketan, so his house was empty. I availed myself daily of its solitude and sat for hours on the flat roof, overlooking the great expanse of the plain.

A mile or two from our house stands the farm where experiments are being made in Japanese garden culture, in improved methods of agriculture, in silkworm breeding, and in many other village industries. The Poet is very proud of this experimental farm; and students are encouraged to learn

all they can from its Director, so that when they go back to their homes they will be able to spread the valuable information they have acquired. Shantineketan takes children quite young and keeps them as long as they care to stay. Till far past the usual age for leaving college students may linger. They seem to have as much freedom as is accorded to scholars in a co-educational school in England. Soon after sunset a band of boys and girls set out to wander over all the grounds singing the Evening Song, so that the occupants of every house can share the blessedness of peace.

Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.

A STUDENT OF MYSTICS

He was a research worker among the mystics. He was on the staff of Shantineketan, with perfect freedom to come and go as he pleased. He would be away for months at a time, wandering alone, seeking out the mystics. It was not organised communities that he sought to study, but rather humble individuals, fishermen in obscure places, cultivators in remote villages, and weavers in their ancient sheds. All mystics bear the same mark, joy, peace and a humility writ so large as to be unmistakable. They will not tell their secret lore to the curious, yet it would sweeten and strengthen men's lives if they could only understand it. They will not commit their ideas or their practice to writing, so the research student sets out from Shantineketan from time to time, finds groups of these men, lives with them and prays with them, so that when he comes home he brings with him a deeper peace, a more convincing hold upon reality to share with the boys and girls of the school and college.

I do not remember this research student's name, but his face is clear to my memory, sensitive, tolerant, and utterly serene. When he found I wanted to hear more about his friends, an evening hour was fixed when seven or eight of us could meet, uninterrupted, in the house of a neighbouring professor. He brought

the note-book that accompanied him on his wanderings, and read from it in slow and rather halting style, as one must if it is necessary to translate into another tongue as one reads.

"Do you say, I will pluck this flower and lay it on my table to make it more accessible? You have not made it more accessible. See, it is beginning already to fade. So long as a tree is alive, it can feed on all that comes its way, rain, sun, wind. When it is dead, and cut up into logs, the rain does not feed it, but rots it. The sunshine does not nourish it, but warps it.

"You can approach God through the method of sameness. God is the servant of all and He is the perfect servant, the efficient servant. You do not see Him or hear Him, you only notice what He does. He sustains our every breath. He provides us with everything we need, like a wise, foreseeing house-keeper who never gives way to fussing. If you want to realise God, you must choose sameness. You have to serve, serve, serve. Only thus will you get to know Him.

"Surely you would not be a beggar to God, supplicating Him for an alms! If you would approach Him thus, you can certainly get your boon granted; but having received it, you leave Him as a beggar leaves his benefactors when his need is supplied. Or like a hired workman, you can claim your month's wages and leave His service. Would you not rather hear Him call you as a friend, 'Comrade, stay and

work with Me. There is much to do'? You must pay the price. It is only the giving up of wages. Then you become the helper of God. Do you say, 'How can I serve? I, who am a nobody?' Ah! but the world needs so much. You need only give your best, however small that is, just as the flower must open out to its utmost extent, however small it is. If it is all you have, all you are and all you know, it is enough.

"The slave to Reasoning says, 'I cannot see God.' That is true, and we cannot show Him to you, friend. What? Do you think He is a creaking wheel of a waggon, heralding its own approach? Or a clumsy servant who draws attention to himself by his inefficiency? In a land ruled over by a tyrant, a man may not speak, saying 'I recognise no king. There is no king.' The tyrant would squeeze his life from his throat. But God's land is free. You may say, 'There is no God', and still God will continue to serve you with food, with joy, and with breath.

"The moon and the stars cannot be seen during the day because the sun is too obvious. But they are there, waiting to be revealed, waiting to serve you, and as soon as the blinding glare of the daylight goes, they can be seen and loved. It is ourselves that are the blinding glare that prevents men from seeing God.

"Before you set out for work, you must salute God. Do you say there is no time? That you must get on with your job? But your work is dead without God.

It becomes dull and lifeless, cut off from reality, like the plucked flower. If God is in the centre of your work it becomes easy. There is no weariness, because God fills you with strength and joy, and you have enough for everything. When you get to your place of labour, salute the people you are going to work with. See God in them. Do not pity them.

"There was a man of God centuries ago who made the habit of waiting in silence before he took his food. He would wait until he could feel that God Himself was offering him the food. One morning his silent waiting was long. He could not feel that God was giving him his meal, so he fasted and prayed.

"During his prayers he came to realise that an action displeasing to God had been committed. One of his followers had scorned and despised a man of low caste. God said, 'Thus you dishonour Me.'

"The holy man was perplexed. 'But, Lord, if we were to honour such a man we should be breaking the laws of our Church. Would You have us break those laws?'

"God said, 'I do not ask you to break any laws. I only say you cannot have Me and those laws. You must choose.'

" 'Lord, I choose You, then.'

"The holy man was so uplifted by these new thoughts that he said, 'As soon as morning breaks, I will go out to tell all men of this great new teaching.'

"He slept from two till three in the morning.

Then God called him again, 'Why do you wait thus for the morning? Does the sun make the morning of your life? Or am I your morning?'

" 'Lord, I go now,' said the holy man. As he set out he saw sweepers, tanners, builders and men of every trade starting out for their day's work. He stopped them, and taught them what God had told him that day, that barriers between man and man must be broken down. God is everywhere and in every man. His path is open. There are no barriers between men of different creeds, habits, clothes, nations or castes. This is hard teaching. No wonder some say: 'In my path are barriers, Churches, Temples, Chapels, holy things. Ah! if they were only walls, Lord, I would break them down at whatever cost of energy or pain. But they are holy things. Must I break through these?' "

This is the great problem stirring the heart and troubling the mind of Young India.

UNTOUCHABLES

I was sitting with some other guests one afternoon on a verandah which overlooked the courtyard of our host's house, when I noticed an Untouchable girl about fifteen years old, stealing from path to path, her gaze always directed towards the baby of our party, a delightful brown-faced little girl of fifteen months. When the child's nurse happened to be there, the girl sedulously kept in the background. In her absence the poor girl would come quite near, adoring the infant with her eyes, and even daring to make little affectionate sounds with her tongue.

Suddenly the favourable moment arrived; the nurse had withdrawn; the girl stole up close to us, and the child's mother, touched by her affectionate regard, put the babe into her arms. Supreme joy reigned and a stillness that had something of awe in it. Presently, like an avalanche, there burst forth a fury of energetic indignation. Rebukes, shouts and lamentations filled the air, as the nurse, shouting over her shoulder to the rest of the orthodox household, swooped down upon the four of us, driving the girl away with vituperations, happily untranslatable. She snatched the baby from the unhallowed hands and thrust her roughly, and with a sort of horror, into the mother's arms. The nurse kept up her torrential flow of language, though it was easy

to see that she was protesting so vigorously mainly in order to impress upon the rest of the household assembled behind her the high standard of orthodoxy she maintained. The more offended she was the more genteel and respectable she would appear. The mother, trying to calm her, offered the child to her, but no! she could not yet take back her precious baby. She must sanctify herself again. She must wash off the stain and shame of having touched a child that an Untouchable had just caressed. She must go down to the Ganges—fortunately it flowed past the end of our garden—she must have a ceremonial bath, an all-over bath, her hair must be included in the ablutions. Ah! it was a crying shame! What a good thing the master of the house kept a family priest! Thanks to him, she would be able to have her caste mark of Ganges mud, freshly made, in the middle of her forehead.

The hullabaloo died down eventually and we relapsed into normal life on the verandah, while the baby played by herself placidly.

There are about fifty million Untouchables in India, pariahs, born outside the pale, outside Hinduism. It is said that only by refusing to mingle with them in any way were the Hindus able, centuries ago, to preserve their ancient habits of rigorous cleanliness. Untouchables do not have the daily bath. They do not wash their clothes each day. They eat things left over from the day before. They eat carrion. They do not brush their teeth, which

are decayed and dirty. All the unpleasant work, the sanitary work, is theirs. They must look after corpses, wind them round and round with coloured sateen, carry them to the Burning Ghats, cremate them there and throw the bones into the river. They may not approach a Hindu. They may not draw water from the wells. If the shadow of an Untouchable happens to fall upon the food of the humblest Hindu sitting by the roadside, it is polluted, and thenceforth good for nothing but to be trodden underfoot.

Long ago Gandhiji set his face against all that. Little by little he has popularised the idea that the whole doctrine of Untouchability is a sin against God, so that now even the bitter opposition of the Brahmins is lessening.

Whenever he is speaking at a public meeting there will always be an honourable place reserved for Untouchables. In his own Ashram they are welcome even in the kitchen, the most sacred place of a Hindu household. The dirty scavenging work that is usually left for them to do is performed by himself or by honoured guests and Brahmins. The quiet common sense of his assertion that God looks on all human beings as members of His family is steadily gaining ground.

“How can we grumble at the tyranny of an alien race while we ourselves are tyrannising over our own fellow-countrymen?” he asks.

Some years ago Gandhiji's followers decided upon

a piece of direct action on behalf of Untouchables. One of the great religious festivals was about to be held, and pilgrims from all over India were preparing to attend. Complicated safeguards were being contrived in order to preserve the sacred shrines inviolate from unhallowed curiosity. Very well, then! Let volunteers present themselves before the shrine, bringing with them Untouchable brothers. Let volunteers and Untouchables crave permission to visit the holy shrines together.

The little company set out, a strange assortment, the lowest and the highest of the land. Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity. News of the undertaking flashed over the whole country. The Brahmins responsible for the festival heard of it and forthwith put up barricades across the roads, blocking every possible entrance to their city, and waited.

The moment of arrival came. Inside the barricades stood the priests. Outside in the middle of the road stood the volunteers, each with his arm round the shoulder of an Untouchable. "Brother, will you let these our companions come in with us to visit the holy shrine?" Permission was peremptorily refused. The volunteers proceeded to reassure the Brahmins. "We are followers of Mahatmaji.¹ Therefore we practise Ahimsa.² There is no need, therefore, to keep up these barricades. We shall not force our

¹ Mahatmaji = the name by which Gandhiji is known.

² Ahimsa = non-violence.

way in." Saying this they proceeded to squat on the roadside in the attitude of prayer, arms on each other's shoulders still.

At meal-times they were relieved by other volunteers. Splitting the time into shifts, they kept up their vigil, day in and day out, for weeks. Surely the hearts of the priests would be melted at last! The way of Satyagraha¹ was slow, but it was sure. They were convinced of that.

After about six weeks came the rains, the torrential, never-ceasing downpour of the East. By and by they were standing up to their knees in water. But they persisted. "There is more power with us than with them", they meditated. "With them is the barricade of wood, but with us is the power of God to help us and fight our battles."

At length, quite suddenly, the Brahmins gave way. Throwing down the barricades that up till then had symbolised their creed, they salaamed their welcome to the Untouchables and led them into the shrine.

¹ Satyagraha = the spiritual power of love and good will.

BENARES FROM A BARGE

Outside the city of Benares, a few miles farther up the River Ganges, stands a large square house enclosing one garden and surrounded by another.

It was only a few minutes' walk from the lotus pool to the banks of the river, where the family barge was moored in readiness to take us up or down stream in slow and stately ease, according to our pleasure.

However much one has heard or read of Benares, the first sight of it from the river produces an almost overwhelming impression. The life of the city seems to be focused on its river-banks. Here temples stand and enclosures are reserved for ceremonial bathing. Broad stone steps stretch for miles and miles, and they are always thronged.

It is the desire of the faithful throughout India to bathe in the Ganges where it flows through the holy city of Benares, and actually to die there would be bliss.

Though each day thousands are occupied in the same ritual, I saw no jostling or confusion. Standing up to their knees in the holy water, old and young, men and women, they were all engrossed in the saying of the appropriate prayers and the immersion of their whole bodies at the correct intervals; their

steady gaze was directed straight ahead of them, away from the city and across the river.

Nothing distracted their attention. A servant brought a great wicker-basket filled with refuse, collected after the sweeping out of one of the temple-courts—dirt, banana skins, dead flowers and less savoury ingredients. Splash! It was all thrown into the river just where the pilgrims stood. It did not disturb them in the least, for they hold that there is something so holy, so potent about water, that no filth can possibly violate its purity. It is intrinsically clean, and because God is in it, it has a cleansing power over everything that mingles with it.

After passing hundreds of bathers we came to the Burning Ghats, a continuation of the stone steps, but in this place owned by Untouchables, whose work it is to take charge of the bodies of the dead. Here we saw the fires blazing and the corpses swathed in many yards of coloured sateen, which every now and then was turned over bodily by the skilful manipulation of a couple of bamboo poles held at each end by an Untouchable. On the top steps, meanwhile, sat the nearest relatives of the deceased, waiting for the sad office to be completed.

As we made the return journey there seemed to be no change in the spectacle. The prayers and the ceremonials continued, the lazy-looking fakirs with their unshorn matted hair, proud of their insensibility to pain, still awaited the alms of the simple, the pilgrims were still intent on getting closer union

with God through their prayers, and the old man whom I had noticed lying alone, emaciated and scarcely able to breathe, but with a look of almost terrible exaltation in his eyes, was still nearer to his heart's desire, death in Benares on the banks of the Ganges.

The Untouchables of Benares are the "Doms", a criminal tribe who lived together until quite recently under police supervision. Some missionary friends very kindly took me to visit them. I tried to imagine what it would be like to have been born into a criminal tribe, to be accounted from birth not only a sinner from the religious point of view, like other Untouchables, but a criminal also from the civil point of view. Twice each night it was the custom of the civil authorities to send the police to the "Dom" settlement to give the roll-call. Whoever did not answer to his name would be held suspect, if later on it transpired that a crime had been committed in the city that night. The Wesleyan Mission nobly volunteered to take the responsibility of supervising the "Doms'" life, instead of the police, and there is a great difference already in their outlook. If a "Dom" happens to be a friendly soul and calls out a greeting in the street to someone he knows by sight, a carter, a coolie, or a policeman, he is held to have insulted that person, and the affronted one can bring him before the courts, where he may be fined. But as I walked through the settlement with the Mission nurse, it was a joy to see the friendliness apparent,

the questions asked, the interest aroused. At length we came to a diminutive schoolroom with a low entrance like a cave, wherein sat a row of eager little children.

How keen they were on learning! How they revelled in the Christmas story their teacher was telling them! How they listened, all ears and eyes, when I told them a little about our children in East London, and gave them their love! That seemed quite a wonderful thing to them, and when I promised to send them some pictures they almost danced with joy. If our boys and girls wrote to them, would they write back? I asked. That made them feel very proud, and one by one they went up to the black-board to show me, with laborious care, how well they could form their letters. I hated leaving the "Doms" of Benares.

But of course it was a different story, when in the middle of the night one heard faint sounds in the garden outside the bedroom, and queer noises of pebbles sliding down the sloping roof. One remembered hearing one's hostess say that the thieving season was beginning, that they generally made a few preliminary noises outside to see if anyone inside was awake, and that the correct thing to do was to intimate one's alertness, when they would pass on to pay their attention to a sleepier household. I cleared my throat loudly and tried to produce a convincing cough or two. Then I heard someone on the other side of the house clap his hands as one

might to shoo away trespassing chickens, and all was still again. What simple-hearted thieves these must have been! Perhaps because it was so early in the season!

It was in Benares that I heard about the picketing of the drink shops that was undertaken during the Non-Co-operation days. Gandhiji had been constantly reminding his followers of the evils of alcohol, pointing out the difference between the social life of East and West, warning his countrymen against European drinking habits, and emphasising the fact that both Islam and Hinduism enjoined entire abstinence. But now they decided to go further. There should be a demonstration that would convince the most unthinking, that would reach the ears of those who never go to meetings, and meet the eyes of those who could not read the papers. It took some time to prepare the programme, and then, carrying out the vow of truth, it could not be put into operation in any district until the chief British official had been acquainted with every detail of the scheme. To get volunteers for the job was the easiest part of the work. On a certain day the licensee of each drink shop in the town saw outside his doors two or three Khaddar-clothed men. As each intending customer approached, these men would politely salaam him and say, "Why do you drink this poison stuff, brother? Will you not change your mind and come next door, where we have prepared coffee?"

Most drinkers in India are Untouchables, so they

regarded it as a great honour to be spoken to by Hindus, and gladly complied with their request. The volunteers had an easy time of it, and the licensee had no one to serve. After a while there was some opposition, and it was suggested to the drinkers that they should be a little less docile. The next customer to approach the shop would not let himself be persuaded so easily to go next door and take coffee. He refused to turn back, and made as though he would force an entrance. The volunteers, seeing his persistence, reassured him. "We are Ahimsa people, so we shall not attempt to use force to stop you going in." They then proceeded to do the characteristically Indian thing, to lie down full length on the pavement outside the door of the shop.

Of course no Indian would be so discourteous as to step over the prostrate form of men of such spirit, so they stayed there watching, wondering and admiring. Meanwhile a crowd collected to see this strange sight. High-caste people lying on the ground willing for Untouchables to walk over them.

There does not need to be a very big crowd in an Indian city to create a disturbance of traffic, and the police soon came up and arrested the volunteers for obstruction. As soon as one set of men was arrested, others appeared to take their place, so that in one province alone that year twelve thousand people were imprisoned for drink-shop picketing.

The result was that licenses were scarcely worth

buying, and at the next annual auction in Calcutta, where licenses were customarily knocked down to the highest bidder, scarcely anyone turned up to bid at all. The immense revenue that ordinarily accrues to the Government from Excise dwindled to next to nothing that year.

Then came Gandhiji's great venture of faith, the calling off of the Non-Co-operation Campaign. The drink-shop pickets were removed, the revenue shot up again, even surpassing its previous figure, and it was left to the Village Workers to carry on the campaign against alcohol in a less spectacular fashion.

THE WESTERNER LEARNS

I went to India peculiarly ignorant. Not only was I innocent of all geographical knowledge, since I acquired my schooling at a period when the educational experts had decreed that it should not be taught to such as I, but I have always disliked biographies and books of travel, and refused to read them.

As a result, many of the happenings with which I was involved in India were entirely new and surprising to me, whereas others might have been better prepared for them.

For instance, I could not accept, nor assimilate as I ought to have done, the Indian habit of reverence for the old, the rising to one's feet in the presence of one's parents, and the silence before one's teacher. It always seemed unnatural and artificial to me, though I could see it was not really so, but was an integral part of the Hindu social system.

Another thing that I did not know was the facility for memorising and quoting which most Indians possess. So in conversation with an Indian official, a Judge or Superintendent of Police, if the subject turned to current events in England, which at the time of my visit were overshadowed by the great strike of 1926-27, I would stare in dismay to hear my companion give me a long dissertation with an

air of most sincere conviction on the significance and illegality of the strike weapon, and all this in the flowing periods of Lord Oxford or Sir John Simon.

One occasion is worth describing. Some Indian friends having led me through many strange places, brought me at last to a great scholar who had been so good as to invite me to stay in his community. Immediately on my arrival he graciously came down to the rooms that had been put at my disposal. My companions introduced us and we squatted on the floor opposite each other; both my cheery friends squatted at our sides in utter silence. Evidently it was ordained throughout past centuries that the great man and I should sit thus, amid the admiring appreciation of all beholders, and converse together while eating sweetmeats.

It is not what one wants to do at the end of a long journey. One wants a wash and a square meal. However, I should probably have responded fairly well to his laudable attempt to make topical conversation if he had not lit on the subject of the strike.

"Yes," I answered his query, "I was in the midst of it all."

"How very interesting," he remarked with a bland smile. "And what did you think of it?"

"Those ten days were a revelation."

"Of the energy and spirit of those who broke it up, I suppose you mean?" he inquired.

"I meant a revelation of the determination and

good will and patience of the working people of England," I replied.

He looked surprised at that, and began: "But it was an illegal act, an attack on the community, a clear example of sectionalism," and then he burst out into heavy-sounding phrases, working up to the climax of noble abstractions all too familiar to every English newspaper reader.

"Well, you know, we don't all hold with the lawyers," I replied as he paused, waiting for my ratification of his somewhat high-flown sentiments.

"But—but your own leaders." He seemed to be adjuring me to conformity. "Sir John, Lord Oxford, they say——" and he began on a few more flights of heavy oratory.

I signed to him to stop by letting myself look as bored as I felt. "We don't set so much store by words now as we did before the war," I assured him. "The strike cannot be satisfactorily disposed of in such terms as you have just quoted."

"But we have read the accounts of it in our papers, and the speeches made by some of your greatest Englishmen."

"Because you read in your newspapers accounts of something that is happening in England, it doesn't mean that you know what is happening. I have read many of your newspapers since I came here."

He looked at me doubtfully. I tried to reassure him.

"It is not only the Indian Press," I said, "but in England one cannot always rely on the papers for a proper report of the important things that happen."

"But if Lord Oxford says," he pleaded once more for the accuracy of his information.

I cut in unceremoniously: "How did he or any of the great men know what was going on in the minds of the people during the struggle? They definitely did not."

"But I assure you, Miss Lester, that the working people of England have through this action taken up a stand that is . . ."

I saw that he was about to treat me to another large portion of diplomatic oratory, and I stretched out my hand and said something that must have broken every canon of Indian good taste and decent behaviour.

"Excuse me, Mr. S——, but I don't think you know what you are talking about."

Unpardonable rudeness, but I could not help it. I had to shake my host's faith in newspapers, and I could no longer bear to see my other Indian friends sitting there all eyes and ears and no tongue; I wanted passionately to be rid of the sound of superior English sentiments, and I got my heart's desire.

My host blinked a moment, waited in case he had misheard, swallowed too rapidly and a crumb of sweetmeat went down the wrong way. He had to

rise, go out on to the verandah and regain control over himself.

I sat in trepidation, wondering what would happen as a result of my ruthlessness. Would my silent Indian companions ever be able to condone such a lapse?

The great man returned and resumed his squatting posture with perfect composure, wearing an expression of greatly heightened interest; he bent forward most benignly and carried on where we had left off.

"So you think we do not get the most reliable news service out here in India," he began. "I should be glad to hear from you, as an eyewitness, how the people involved stood the strain. Tell me about the working people themselves."

That was what I wanted, for I am convinced that Indians and East End people ought to be brought together, so closely akin are they in their natures, their affection, their spontaneity, their generosity, their straightforwardness, and their religious spirit.

Another thing struck me as strange. Hindus seem to have no sort of difficulty in accepting the worship of Jesus Christ as a part of their own devotion, and among their holy men they will class, as a matter of course, any Christian person who is devoting himself to God. The Rest Houses in Hardwar, built for pilgrims to the holy places and endowed by Indian Princes and Rajahs, are available to any Christian who would care to shelter there. One need only put on the saffron robe as an easily recognisable sign of the seeker after God, and one can tramp the

whole of India without money. Every village has its own guest-room or its temple room where pilgrims may sleep and get food sufficient to enable them to tramp to the next shelter.

A Brahmin friend took me, one evening, into the great cool garden of one of these Rest Houses, put at the disposal of pilgrims to Hardwar. Stone seats were placed along the paths, on which saffron-robed monks were squatting in the attitude of prayer, beneath trees on whose branches lanterns were hung, swaying in the breeze. Everything spoke of peace and eternity. We wandered round every path of the garden, and at last, passing under a bridge, were surprised to hear the roaring sound of water. Apparently we had reached the river. Swirling and bounding, the Ganges flashed past us.

It was reluctantly that we turned back in the gathering darkness to find our way out of the Rest Garden. At the gate a holy man approached us, salaaming almost to the ground. "Thank you for letting me come in," I said, salaaming in return. "I only wish you would honour our poor abode by staying here for many days," he replied.

"Was he just being polite, or did he mean it?" I inquired eagerly as soon as we had left the place.

"He meant it, of course. He knows that you are serving God, as I am, and we welcome all such," was the reply of my Brahmin friend.

This all-inclusiveness is not the least valuable of the lessons the Westerner learns in India.

MANNERS

To anyone accustomed to East London, the manners of the Orient seem extraordinary. I am used to having cheery, comrade-like greetings thrown at me from the other side of the street, children repeatedly singing out my name on three high notes until I look round and acknowledge their salutation—a smile will do; people calling “coo-ee” from upper windows, a girl I have passed without noticing remarking, “Ye’re not ’arf proud when ye’re aht, Miss Lester!” A pub-hunter at the corner kept a watch on me for years before he finally decided that I had passed his test of worthiness. Then he exchanged his careless nod of the head for a doffing of his greasy cap.

Very different is the attitude of the Indian. You land at Bombay, you see lordly compatriots of ours striding through the crowd, taking all the salaams for granted. You see the continuous cringing attitude of the poor. You ask yourself if it is possible that you can ever get used to it. Will you, perhaps, in a sort of weary disgust of it, become like these other English men and women? “I bet if we stayed here a year we’d be as lordly as any of them,” prophesies my young fellow-traveller.

India is obviously very bad for the manners of English people. It might be true that at the end of a year I should be as lordly as any, but in the mean-

while I knew not where to look or how to hide my disgust and confusion at the behaviour of my compatriots. I went out shopping with the young wife of an English judge of rather advanced and liberal views. Her raised voice and petulant manner were much in evidence. No matter what the ever-courteous shopkeeper showed her, she shouted at him. She asked for my advice about matching some material, and the mere fact that I answered in an ordinary voice seemed to make her realise the pitch of her own, and she apologised for her "nerves". But the next minute she was shouting at the imperturbable Indian again. When we returned to the car I was thankful that it made for home. She showed me her exquisite house, and took me into the kitchen-quarters. "Oh, these servants! The lazy creatures!" she exclaimed, pointing to some cloths. "These ought to have been wrung out in boiling water, but they won't do it if I'm not by to make them."

"*Boiling* water?" I queried.

She looked at me surprised. "Yes, not very pleasant, of course, but I used to have to do it, so why shouldn't they?"

She was gradually being ruined by her life in India. Can we afford to let so many of our best deteriorate in this way?

Even the act of taking something from another person's hands becomes a sharp gesture of irritation. They snatch, Englishmen and Indians alike. They

may say they mean nothing by it, and many of them are unconscious of the habit, but it is symptomatic. The mild-eyed, grave-faced Hindu bows low as he presents an envelope to his master. The master does not take it as we always take things in England. He definitely snatches it with a quick, jerky action that is quite unmistakable. It may be the clerk in a bank or the chief cashier in a shop, the Superintendent of Police, or some other official, white or brown, but he invariably snatches, and does not say "Thank you".

There is no word for "Thank you" in Hindi, I was told. "There is no need to say it, sister," they would explain. "We like to serve you." But there is need for an English person to express it either in look or word, because it is our custom, and our manners should not deteriorate because we go to India.

I was incredulous at first when the twelve-year-old grandson of one of my hosts, a Hindu millionaire, casually remarked one afternoon that he had nearly been pushed out of the train by a fellow-passenger. But everyone present in the room, including a European lady who knew India well, took for granted that what had happened to the boy was quite normal.

"You were coming from school?" I asked.

"Yes. I didn't notice that there was an Englishman in the compartment." The compartments on Indian railways are large enough to allow six passengers to stretch out at full length and sleep.

"Why shouldn't you get in with him?" I inquired.

He shrugged his shoulders amusedly.

"What happened then?" I persevered.

"When he saw me getting in, he told me to get out, but there wasn't time to find another place because the train was just starting, so I hung on."

"Hung on? Do you mean he tried to push you out?"

"Oh yes!" answered the boy nonchalantly. "But he didn't manage it this time," he added, chuckling.

I brought up this incident on several occasions afterwards in order to notice people's reaction to it.

"Well, why should they get in where we are?" said one English girl to me. "There's always room somewhere else."

"They might not always find it, though," I replied. "Besides, the trains are theirs. It's their country, isn't it?"

She tossed her head impatiently, another example of the bad effect of the Indian climate on English people.

One of my hosts, a clever and influential Hindu lawyer, had to travel a great deal, and being both a humorist and a lover of adventure, he usually took off his faultless European clothes and put on Indian dress before a journey. Then he accepted any insults that came his way and waited. A favourable oppor-

tunity usually came during the long journey to have a straight talk with the European who had put on airs, and whether he was some petty official or ignorant young clerk, the offender was a trifle disillusioned as to his race superiority at the end of the journey.

Of course, for creature comforts there is no place like India. Europeans have impressed deeply on the Indian mind the idea that we are creatures who simply cannot live unless we have certain amenities. I would appear on a station platform, an utterly unknown, unimportant woman. Almost immediately, as though by magic, there would appear a low, easy chair. If I walked up to the other end of the platform it would follow me. Food, too, arrived for me, most excellent meals, apparently at whatever cost to the railway time-table. "Do not hurry, Miss Sahib. The train will wait," the guard, well-trained by generations of English, assured me.

Our amusements, too, it seems, must be provided at whatever cost to Indian sensibilities. Cinema posters are not the most healthy stimulus to susceptible young people in this country, but at any rate the languorous regard, the lingering kiss, the caressing embrace, are taken with a grain of salt, a pinch of common sense. Think what these mean to a people so strictly brought up that the sight of a woman is supposed to be dangerous, and to mention the word "kiss" is a misdemeanour, a serious lapse from good taste, I was taken on one side by a

Professor of Calcutta University and warned of this unwritten rule because I had happened to mention the word in some story I was relating. Here are the cinemas, come to stay. Here cluster round their huge display-posters a little group of peeping, half-ashamed, curious young men. Every now and then they look up furtively at the picture pasted on the wall—the woman seductive and subtle, the challenging attitude, the sex-drenched appeal, the title written in huge letters below, “The Sainted Devil”.

If our cinema is offensive, our dancing is not less so. To a Hindu mind it is utterly sinful. Is it wise to insist on doing in a foreign country that which is repugnant to the moral sense of its inhabitants?

Whose land is it? What do good manners dictate? Is the old phrase “*Noblesse oblige*” dead? Are we English out there so openly for our own advantage that we do not feel any qualms about the effect that our amusements may have on the morale of the Indian?

India does not seem to have a very good effect on most English people. Among the second-class passengers on the homeward voyage the young men who were on leave from their business firms seemed to have no interest in life except drink. They paced the deck moodily for the first hour or two after breakfast, having laid some little restriction on themselves in that respect, and then at about eleven o'clock they let themselves go, and nothing else mattered all day long. I wondered if they had con-

tracted this vacuous outlook on life through living in India without being shown anything great or admirable in the people of that country. I felt sorry for the mothers of those young men, so soon to realise what India had made of their sons.

MISSIONARIES

During my stay in India I met splendid missionaries, great characters, wise and far-seeing, some of them with intuition and discernment that went deep enough to satisfy any mystic. Their courtesy and kindness to me were the more impressive in that they knew that I was carefully avoiding their hospitality. I was offered introductions to many missionaries' homes, and in each case I explained that my object was to stay with Indians, and therefore I must refuse their kindness. Yet, wherever I went, missionaries of all Societies were ready with a welcome and an invitation to as little or as much hospitality as I desired. I saw their churches and hospitals, their schools and colleges, their homes and hostels. Some things about them struck me as good, some as bad. To sum up my impressions would be absurd and unfair, for my experience was short, but it may be worth while to mention a few of the most striking things I saw.

There was a splendid missionary doctor whose great gift was to save people from blindness. When he was taking me over the hospital which was his joy and pride, he asked if I would like to wait and see an operation which he was to perform in half-an-hour's time. I felt no sort of desire to accept the invitation, as I am one of those ill-seasoned people

who cannot look at a simple wound or even a "bad" finger without experiencing a distinct stab of pain myself, as though someone had inserted a corkscrew in me and were turning it round. But I did not like to own up to my missionary host. Obviously he was inviting me to the very finest thing he had to show. So I accepted, simulating pleasure, and half-an-hour later found myself ensconced in a corner of the operating-room, from which, if I cared to, I could see his every movement. Mercifully he was too engrossed in the skilful manipulation of his instruments to notice how studiously I kept my eyes averted. Every now and again I stole a glance, not at the prostrate form of an old Indian woman lying there, unchloroformed but quiet, but at the surgeon. By and by I could not keep my eyes off him. A subtle change came over him as he worked; he was so entirely sure of himself, every one of his powers co-ordinated to a single end, the restoration of sight. The lines seemed to disappear from his brow. Everything that was partial, discordant, or unsatisfied in his nature seemed to vanish. I had never noticed before how broad his brow was, how magnanimous his look. There was something god-like about him. He was fulfilling his destiny, unhurried, unperturbed, entirely master of the situation, a creator.

My fellow-visitor had been gibing at my apprehension half-an-hour before, but very soon he had to be led out, his cheeks the colour of mildewed

parchment. In fact, I had to assist his tottering form to balance itself on an upturned box on the verandah. For a time he was too far gone in physical anguish to care, but afterwards I had to help restore his self-respect by agreeing that it was a tall order to sit by and see a man puncture an old lady's eye at one end, and then press at its other end, pushing determinedly at something inside, working it along persuasively under the skin of the eyeball, until at last there emerges with some difficulty from the tiny puncture a lump of colourless gelatine.

I am sure that that devoted missionary, surrounded as he was by whole families of supplicants for sight, was typical of hundreds whom I never met.

The head mistress of a big girls' school was a different sort of missionary. Her work was excellent, the school well organised, the girls happy. But it was obvious that she did not know much about the new spirit in India. She could scarcely believe me when I spoke about Gandhiji breaking down Untouchability, his setting Brahmins to do the sanitary work of the Ashram instead of sweepers, and so on. So incredulous was she, that I promised to get my information confirmed and send her word later on. What a pity that, a teacher herself, she had never troubled to learn the facts about a man of such great influence over his fellows! She seemed also ignorant of the fact that to a Hindu the sign of godliness is serenity, that the holy man and woman devoted to God are always to be recognised by their

imperturbable calm, by the peace that the world cannot give. Either she was ignorant of this very definite criterion of theirs, or else thought it not worth considering; otherwise the incident she related to me could never have occurred. One of her teachers was a Hindu who was sometimes untruthful. When one day she found him teaching one of her girls to lie, she turned on him the full vials of her wrath. He listened quietly to her representations, and when she had finished, said: "I thought you were a servant of God."

"I hope I am," she answered wonderingly.

"How then can you become so angry?" he inquired.

Perhaps in that scene we have hit upon the heart of the trouble in India. It is psychological. Her retort to his quiet-spoken query did not ease the situation. She did not accept even for the time being his Hindu criterion of godly and ungodly behaviour, though she might have gone on from that to build up her plea for truthfulness. She brought Jesus Christ into the argument on her side, ranging Him definitely outside the Hindu system of religious thought. She said: "There is such a thing as righteous indignation. Jesus Christ Himself got angry." Then she proceeded to remind him of the turning out of the money-changers from the temple. She may have justified herself, but it was at a great cost.

One devoted Indian Christian whom I met recognised in the Ashram idea the form of religious

expression most natural to the country. She longed for the time to come when her friends, the missionaries, would be allowed to give up the Compound system, where the big, old houses make the keeping of servants inevitable; she wanted the little churches, with their ultra-European architecture and stiff pews, pulled down and new ones built suitable to the national habit of squatting, with walls opening on to wide verandahs, where inquirers, passers-by, and self-conscious people might stand, hearing and seeing all, while still preserving their aloofness. She longed to set up Ashrams inside the compounds, where all the work could be shared, where everyone, Christian, Hindu or Atheist, would be welcome so long as he wanted to serve. There, the lives of the missionaries would be as open to the public as is Gandhiji's, and distinctions of race and caste would be blotted out in the joy of serving Christ. The worship of God would be encouraged in every aspect of daily life, especially in the little church, built in Indian style.

She and I had many talks about her hopes and plans. She tried to make me see that Indian Christians, even mature and devoted ones, get suddenly overwhelmed by a sort of shame when they first realise that the acceptance of the Christian teaching has denationalised them. "Imagine what it is like suddenly to discover that as a child you learnt to pray in a foreign tongue, and that now you cannot break yourself of the habit. I am distressed when I

An English teacher came out of an inner room, followed by her two adopted Indian daughters, both wearing Indian dress. A delicious tea was served, and the talk was wise, profound and natural. The lady had been a missionary once, but found it better to work in this way, living in the Indian quarter of the town and teaching in an Indian school.

She was one of those who signed the letter sent to the Government after the Amritsar trouble, declaring that the missionaries did not want compensation paid, or punishment administered, for any suffering, loss, or even death, that might come upon them as a result of their attempt to teach the Way of Christ in the country of their adoption.

"Obviously the letter had to be sent," I said.

"Of course," she agreed.

"Was it sent round to all the missionaries?"

"Yes."

"How many signed?" I asked.

"Sixteen," she answered in a low voice.

"Oh, how could it be?" I cried in dismay.

There was a pause. "I think the feeling was that to sign it would be like letting down the Government."

Imagine Cæsar's throne depending for its stability on a good word from Paul or Luke!

But this attitude keeps cropping up. Once I was asked to lead a prayer-meeting for women missionaries. I agreed to do so. On the morning fixed for it I happened to be wearing a sari presented to me

by my hostess. As the minutes passed I could not make out why so little spirit was manifest in the proceedings, for there was enthusiasm, the personnel, and the need for an inspiring service. At the end of the hour, when I was feeling rather dashed in spirit, as though I had been throwing my weight against a brick wall, my friend explained, "It was only because they did not like your wearing Indian clothes."

When I returned to England I spoke to a number of missionaries, and asked whether it was likely that my friend's interpretation could be correct. I had scarcely been able to believe it. One who had also returned from India replied, "Probably; we feel that to wear the sari means letting down the prestige of the Government."

What poor, pathetic little souls, to forget their dynamic call to fellowship, forgiveness and humility, and cling to the skirts of temporal power, imagining that without their mite of support it will collapse! If they are in India to support the Government, they should alter their training course. They should begin to study statesmanship and economics, and plunge into political life. They would very soon find that every civilised Government is only too thankful when public opinion begins to approximate to Christian standards. Officials here in England are sometimes near despair because of the callousness and ignorance of the public. Beneficent schemes dear to their heart cannot be realised because people

are not far enough advanced to understand and support them.

If you go to Downing Street or to the seat of Government in other countries and meet the man in power face to face on some great issue, you will probably find him longing to do the right thing, to take the risk, to make the venture of faith, but he cannot because the nation as a whole is not yet up to the standard. One great statesman, with a world-wide reputation, listened gladly to the words of a modern prophet who had made his way into his presence to speak to him in the name of Christ.

"How I would like to take the position you advise!" he said. "But I can't. I don't represent a nation of Christs."

So the temporal power waits for a better and more enlightened people, while those devoted ones, the missionaries, who might be potent if they would be faithful to the Way they have chosen, feel uncomfortable if one of their number wears a sari, saying to each other: "This might embarrass the Government."

Mrs. Naidu, poetess, and ex-President of the Indian National Congress, was ill in a hotel, and word came that Gandhiji was coming to see her. The whole hotel staff preened itself in happy anticipation. The liftman specially congratulated himself that he at any rate would get a good view.

Presently a little man in a loin-cloth, looking like a coolie, came through the wide-open door and entered the lift.

"Here, get out, you!" shouted the servant. "Who do you think you are? Mahatma Gandhi, I suppose?" And he drove the man out.

Whereupon the "coolie" smiled and walked up the staircase, leaving the liftman to look out for Mahatmaji.

If prestige depended on show, or clothes, or the acclamation of a crowd, would this story be told everywhere by Gandhiji's own followers with pride and joy?

When I read *The Christ of the Indian Road* by the American missionary, Dr. Stanley Jones, I thought: "Isn't it too good to be true?" I feared the author might be one of the smug, chatty sort of writers who deceive themselves with their encouraging news.

But I had the privilege of getting to know him well, of attending a whole series of his meetings, of witnessing the crowds of educated Hindus from the University who attended night after night. As we were staying in the same house I noticed his habits. His tireless energy amazed me. "Don't you ever take any time off?" I inquired one day, but he turned the conversation so that he was relieved of the necessity of answering.

Two days later I began again: "I am especially interested in the problem of rest and relaxation. Will you please tell me, do you really go on at this pace all the time? You never appear hurried or tense or weary. Don't you ever take any time off?"

He stopped to give me an adequate answer when

he saw I was in earnest. "Well, you know," he said with his humorous twinkle, "I think we Christians ought to be like the engines of those express trains. Do you know the sort? They scoop up the water they need as they go along. See?"

Sitting at one of his Round Table conferences with six Hindus and four other Christians, each of us bound ourselves to speak the truth in turn about what we actually found of strength and inspiration in our religion. It was one of the most interesting experiences of my life.

"My religion teaches me that——" and a résumé of a beautiful creed was forthcoming. At the end of the recital the speaker continued in a different voice, "But as that is impossible to work out in my life, my practical programme is to——" and he went on to outline another set of rules quite inferior to the first. I heard this said at the Round Table. By a Hindu or a Christian? I will leave the reader to guess.

A VISIT TO THE INDIAN NATIONAL
CONGRESS

When I discovered that the Nationalist Parliament would be holding its Annual Congress at Assam during my stay in India, I longed to be invited. I waited for some time, but nothing happened. I had perforce to ask if it could be arranged. My host complied with my request immediately, though surprised at my queer taste. Obviously he considered it a boring affair. He had to go each year to do his duty, an important one, but to go for pleasure! and such a long way, right up in Assam! Still, I could see some fine country during the twenty-four-hour journey. The Himalayas rose up like a wall to the north of the railway line.

The organisation of the Congress was excellent. The people of Gauhati had been working for many months in preparation for it. They had cleared the jungle outside the city (incidentally a stray lion had been sacrificed to the exigencies of politics during this performance) in order to set up a canvas city, with sleeping places, cooking places and eating places for every group of delegates. There are scores of different social codes to consider in providing hospitality for Indians; sanitary arrangements and bathing accommodation for over a thousand delegates was arranged, and the canvas for the immense

marquee where the sessions were held was hand-woven, provided by the people of the neighbourhood.

For the leaders, Gandhiji, Mrs. Naidu, and the Ali brothers, they had set up neat little canvas houses in a circle, round a small tent for meals, apart from the main camp.

In the centre of the Congress-marquee was a slightly raised circular platform, covered with a thin white mattress, and surrounded by a low fence of trellis-work to mark the place where we were to leave our shoes. Here sat the President for that year, the retiring President, Gandhiji, the Ali brothers, Motilal Nehru, Pandit Mohan Malaviya, and one or two visitors.

The full Congress lasted about four days, and of this short period one day happened to be Gandhiji's Silence Day. As nothing is ever allowed to disturb that, he stayed in his canvas house for twenty-four hours while the affairs of the nation were attended to without him.

As one listened to the proceedings it seemed fairly certain that Gandhiji would not be able to hold back for an indefinite period the eager extremist section clamouring for independence. Some were already chafing at his insistence on non-violent methods, and one speaker, through whose idealistic phrases the programme and the methods of the Marxist Communist were clearly discernible to an accustomed ear, was cheered to the echo by a certain

section of the delegates. Was it not almost absurd to expect the West to respond to a spiritual programme? Gandhiji was a prophet of God. But his way had not worked. Over and over again he had announced his principles during the past years, noble principles, but evidently the West did not understand such ideas.

During the three years succeeding this Congress these materialist criticisms of Gandhiji have grown more and more insistent, but the burden of his teaching is the same. "I want us to gain our independence more than I want anything on earth. I want it in order that through our freedom we may be more able to serve God, our own poor, and the whole world. But I know we cannot get it through violence. Violence does not prove successful in the long run. Moreover, if we were to get this freedom, this precious gift that God desires us to have, through means that are in themselves evil, it would be worthless to us. It would not be the jewel that we desire. It would be smirched and spoilt by our sin, for violence is a sin."

Behind the Parliament tent, just outside the Congress grounds, there was set out an exhibition of the kind of work to which these young men at Gandhiji's instigation had turned their hands. Here, all day long, were displayed in scores of different booths exquisite work, finest muslin, richest silk, strongest cotton, the result of the extensive propaganda that has been going on all over the country

since the calling-off of the Non-Co-operation Campaign. Gandhiji asked for volunteers who would live in the villages and serve the poor, who would revive among them the handicrafts that once made India famous, those cottage industries that fell into decay when machine-made cotton goods were first introduced into India.

All over the country there has arisen a network of these village centres whose workers tramp many miles every day and each day of the week to different neighbourhoods. When they arrive at a village the people gather round them to hear whatever they have to tell and ask them questions. Hygiene is discussed, better plans of irrigation expounded, or a voluntary gang of peasants organised to clean out the village tank. The evil of alcoholic drink is emphasised, and the value of home spinning.

There is no glamour about being a village worker. Fine deeds are not so easy to produce as fine words. It is a hard life, but all followers of Gandhiji have hardness to face, for he is somewhat ruthless. "You must face the poor with the mind of the poor", is one of his stock phrases. That does not mean passing resolutions to amend their lot, nor counting yourself one of their representatives long after you have acquired the habit of spats and a dress-suit. To volunteer for village work means to live with two other men in a shed with a mud floor, doing your own cooking, your own laundry, saying your prayers at dawn and at sunset, and spending six

days out of seven tramping along the dusty sunbitten roads which lead from village to village. This for a young man of spirit, who has been to Oxford or Cambridge, who might have a brilliant career if he chose, accustomed to the luxury of a rich Indian home, where everything is done for him by a crowd of servants, is a great deal to ask.

Gandhiji believes it is better to ask too much than not enough. He gets his volunteers and the work grows.

I looked at the men in the various booths displaying the beautiful goods they have helped to make. The life-history of some of them was known to me. I had met them before in their own neighbourhood in the village centres.

There was one who used to belong to a secret society of rebels, watched and dogged by the police. Bomb-throwing seemed to their crude and eager youth the only way out of a political situation which they had come to regard as hopeless. Patriotism! Independence! The removal of the foreigner! University life in England had added fuel to the fire of his passion. What other method but violence was likely to disturb the *status quo*? He drank in this teaching, and paid the penalty. His activities were all, by necessity, driven underground. Haunted by the Secret Society, he acquired after some years that harassed, furtive, pallid look that bodes no good for mind or body, individual or society. Then Gandhiji's call for non-violent volunteers and village workers

his brother that morning that enabled me to understand better the session of the Subjects Committee that followed.

There had been, a few days previously, a brutal murder committed by a Moslem fanatic. By pretending to be a suppliant he had gained entry into the inner room of one of the great Hindu religious leaders and then killed him. The whole country was ringing with news of the act, and there was much talk of reprisals, demand for satisfaction, and resolutions expressing regret, over the wording of which feelings began to run high. Threats against the life of the Ali brothers were received at the Congress, and a special meeting of the Subjects Committee was called to review the situation. The tent was crowded with Committee Members. The meeting was protracted. Speech after speech was made. Everyone seemed to be getting a little nervy except the two who were in danger of their lives. They seemed quite uninterested, and only paid enough attention to the speeches to enable them to keep up a running commentary of absurd jokes and apposite remarks, of which I alone got the full advantage.

All over India the politicals were talking about the murder, but it was evident that the ordinary people in Assam, as in other parts of India, were more concerned with Gandhiji than with anything else.

Peasants walked in from the outlying districts round about Gauhati, some of them tramping

twenty miles just for a sight of "the great spirit", as they call him.

On his silence day I was going to the tent next his for a wash when I noticed a crowd of some three or four hundred people standing in utter silence, solemnly gazing at the canvas walls that hid him from their view. The rain was falling, but they never moved. Under their umbrellas they stood for some three hours hoping he would break his rule and come out eventually. His secretary at length prevailed upon him to do so, and he emerged with downcast eyes, as though ashamed of his popularity; he walked round his tent once and then returned to his prayers. The crowd had uttered no sound, but, wholly satisfied, they now melted away.

Two or three hours later there was another mass of people equal in number, congregated for the same purpose. At last they also gained their heart's desire, as did also a third throng of equal size just before sundown.

In the Congress, resolutions were put, votes given, arguments made, threats issued; but all the proceedings, exciting as they were, seemed less important than the silent witness of the lives of Mahatmaji and his quiet, plodding Village Workers.

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN BROTHERS

It was an immense house in the heart of Calcutta at which my taxi stopped. The ground floor consisted of business offices built round a courtyard, from which one could look up to the floors above, where each room opened out on to the gallery.

I was led to the first floor and ushered into a drawing-room furnished in Western style. A delightful tea was soon served and my host introduced to me—I should say one of my hosts, for seven brothers lived in this huge house. The seven wives chose to be in Purdah on the top floor, and the numerous children had the freedom of the house. It was a delightful home to stay in. Good cheer, thoughtfulness for others, high spirits and freedom seemed to pervade the whole place, and, to crown all, there was the luxury of a Western bathroom.

I was shown into a big room adjoining the drawing-room, which was to be my bedroom. "And do not forget, sister," said my host, "whatever you want and whenever you want it, it is yours. Nothing could please us more than for you to ask for anything you like. When would you like your next meal?"

"I would rather have what you have, thank you, without any alteration being made," I replied, and

thereafter I would find my way to the long and narrow dining-room at specified times of the day. Sometimes one brother, sometimes another would be taking his food there, though often they ate with their wives upstairs. Sometimes one of the grown-up sons would be standing in his father's presence, waiting upon both him and me, and a servant was always crouching over a tiny portable stove, producing an unfailing supply of toast and toasted biscuits.

After a short stay I moved northwards, but in a few weeks my plans were suddenly changed, and I wired that I was arriving at their house next day, and this time with a friend. It was immediately after the National Congress, and they already had many visitors in the house, but on our arrival they gently upbraided me.

"Sister, you should not have sent the telegram. What we would like best of all would be to come home from business one day and find you already in possession of your own room here."

The ladies on the top floor were always very kind to me when I went to visit them, but they seemed to have no desire to change places with me; the contentment of Purdah ladies with their lot seems thorough. A Hindu in Delhi told me that he had decided long before his marriage never to keep his wife in Purdah. He found his betrothed rather fearful at the thought of mixing with the world, but in response to his earnest desire she promised to be

free. After the wedding, however, her heart failed her, and she refused to go out. He knew it was a case of now or never, so he picked her up in his arms and carried her through the streets. Ever since that shocking occurrence she has enjoyed her freedom.

It seemed to me that I had almost more freedom in India than at home, if that were possible. I could not quite analyse the situation, but it seemed that the very fact that one was not in Purdah like other women induced in the men an attitude of perfect *camaraderie*. They all acted towards me as though I were a man. It was infinitely restful, and it made everything simple and straightforward.

During the four days in Calcutta I made friends with the Sikhs. At the National Congress I had seen a deputation of these tall, steady-eyed, quiet-looking men. They had brought forward a request which was not complied with. As they filed down the aisle back towards their seats, they had impressed me with a sense of colossal strength and a great capacity for suffering. When I found there was a colony of them in Calcutta, one of my Hindu friends led me down some winding streets until we came to a sudden break in the pathway. There we turned up an entry way, and in the semi-darkness a figure holding a sword leapt up from a bedstead and inquired our business.

On hearing it, the guardian Sikh looked pleased, and led us up to where an outside staircase reached

an upper landing. At the top we were met again by a guardian with the sword, the upright carriage and the beard that distinguish a Sikh from all others.

"Our sister wants to see your temple and hear of your faith," was my introduction, and a sufficient one. I was taken into their temple. The leading Sikh came forward to greet me. There was the glass case containing all the weapons which must be in evidence always at their services. At one end of the hall a man squatted, reading aloud from their Bible in measured, stately tones. Everything about the place seemed quiet, humble and devout.

"I should like to hear about your adventures in Satyagraha," I suggested to the leader. He looked pleased. "When shall we make the appointment for a talk?" he asked, mindful of Western habits of interviewing and the necessity of providing the inevitable chairs that Indians are taught to think we cannot do without. "Couldn't it be now?" I asked, and proceeded to squat on the clean white floor-covering. Three or four other Sikhs came up to join the circle, and a strange tale was told.

The incident was already in the history books and well known to British officials in India. It was one of those most difficult situations that must arise when any foreign Government has to intervene in a religious dispute. This is how it was told me by a leader in the struggle.

"According to the laws of our religion our Bible

must be read aloud continuously in the temple, and this custom was being threatened by the action of a rebel sect.

"Things were becoming serious when the Government intervened. They felt that they had to forbid more Sikhs coming into the disturbed area. That was only natural, but the Sikhs had to come to fulfil the vows of their religion. We are a warlike race, but at this time we had fallen under the influence of Gandhiji, so we decided to make our stand on the principle of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. So the clash came."

It was not the only occasion during the last ten years, I reminded myself, on which men, inspired by Gandhiji's teaching, have felt the cold steel of the bayonet upon their bodies. In a quiet, detached voice, as though he himself had been far away from the terrible scene, he told me the details of the struggle, speaking of this one's heroism, of that one's self-control, of another's courage. He dwelt scarcely at all on the suffering, he merely disclosed the inevitableness of their action. "The order was given to beat our men. The sun was so fierce that the soldiers told off to administer the beating fell on the ground exhausted and parched with thirst when their work was done. Our men were hours without drink."

"But none gave way," I cried out proudly.

"No, none gave way, Miss Sahib."

"Where were you, while all this was happening?"

You are telling of the prowess of all the rest. Weren't you there?" I inquired.

"Oh yes, I was there, Miss Sahib."

"In the midst of it all and up at the front?" I asked.

"With all the others, Miss Sahib," he replied in his quiet voice.

From the windows of a Calcutta house one can see enough to preclude the need of a book to while away the time. A young bullock meanders down the street, sampling the contents of each dustbin left outside the shop doors. Having partaken sufficiently of savoury and dessert, he feels like slumber, and sprawls clumsily across the edge of the path and on to the road. Tram drivers ring their bells with energy, and traffic is soon held up, but the bullock is hard to move.

A little farther up the path lies a fakir on his bed of thorns, experiencing no sensation of pain. Just below one's window, where a water-hydrant is fixed, one can see a faultless demonstration of the ablutions enjoined by the Hindu religion. A man has a few minutes free from his work and uses it to take his daily bath. He hangs his loin-cloth on the pipe while he has an all-over wash, skilfully preserving propriety the while. Then, enwrapped in his clean loin-cloth, he proceeds to launder the so elegantly discarded one, and returns to work refreshed in body and soul.

A woman runs out from a little house next door,

lays a blanket carefully on the pavement, and then fetches out her small infant for a sunbath while she continues her work inside.

One never becomes tired of watching things in Calcutta.

GOOD-BYE TO GANDHIJI

On his return from Gauhati, Gandhiji stayed with a friend in Calcutta for a while. Crowds collected in the street outside, and so many visitors called that the unhappy owner of the house had to stand sentinel by his own stairs, ordering the public about until he was perspiring and weary.

"Never again do I offer Mahatmaji my house!" he muttered to me as I made my way upstairs, but one knew his words meant nothing.

I made my way on to the verandah, where Mrs. Gandhi spent a good deal of her time. It was a pleasure to see her released from the kitchen-work that claims most of her time at the Ashram. She can talk a little English, so the leisure of the Calcutta visit made it possible for us to progress in friendship.

I used to go to the house once or twice each day, as the time of my departure from India was near and Gandhiji had much advice to give me.

"You have seen things for yourself so far; now you must test your experience by that of your fellow-countrymen. It is possible that when you have read more and met others your opinions may change. You must call on the chief Excise official of the city, and have a talk with the Rev. W. C. Anderson. There's nothing he does not know about the opium and drink situation.

"Furthermore, you cannot begin to speak in public in England about what you have seen here without first going to the India Office and telling Lord Birkenhead all you intend to say."

My heart sank. That statesman's glittering prizes and his sharp and gleaming swords had never appealed to me; but the ruthless voice continued:

"You must not leave this Province without seeing the Governor. You must go to Lord Lytton and tell him what you are going to say in England."

"But I don't know him, and he won't want to see me," I demurred.

"You can easily get an interview with him. You are a British subject," he went on in his even, impersonal tone, something akin to the hum of the spinning-wheel which he turns all the time that he is speaking.

"How?" I demanded.

"It is easy. You can do it. You must also see the Bishop of Calcutta."

"But, Gandhiji, I have to leave the day after to-morrow," I objected.

"Then send a wire and cancel your passage," he replied tranquilly, his eyes intent on his wheel as usual. I preferred not to, however. So I called on the Bishop in the hope that he would perhaps arrange an interview with the Governor. But naturally enough he could see no special reason why Lord Lytton should want to see me.

"Unless you are a fully accredited social worker,"

he added, having heard that I lived in East London.

Hastily replying: "Oh, no! Certainly not. I am no such thing," I thrust from me the hideous imputation and retired to the house of the seven brothers, there to pen a note to His Excellency asking for ten minutes of his valuable time. The letter was despatched and the answer received by phone within an hour or two. I was invited for the next afternoon. It was no small ordeal to drive up through the stiff, imposing garden, past the flight of gleaming white stone steps, to the doorway guarded by Indians in crimson-velvet uniforms. Governors in India are supposed to keep a state that is more than kingly. I felt shabby, inconsequent, out-of-place and futile.

But as soon as I reached Lord Lytton in his own room everything became easy. How absurd it is that we let ourselves get frightened and oppressed by things, by appearances, by superficialities like those stone steps, the flunkeys and the formal garden, when all the time people are so easy to get on with.

Gandhiji continued his spinning as I told him of the delightful hour I had spent with the Governor. He was obviously pleased with all the visits I had paid, and before saying farewell he reminded me of the correct procedure to be followed if one wants to attain one's end.

"Speak the truth, without fear and without

exaggeration, and see everyone whose work is relative to your purpose. You are on God's work, so you need not fear men's scorn.

"If they listen to your requests and grant them, you will be satisfied. If they reject them, then you must make their rejection your strength.

"Let me know how you get on. Write to me about your own work, too. ~~Good-bye.~~ God bless you."

